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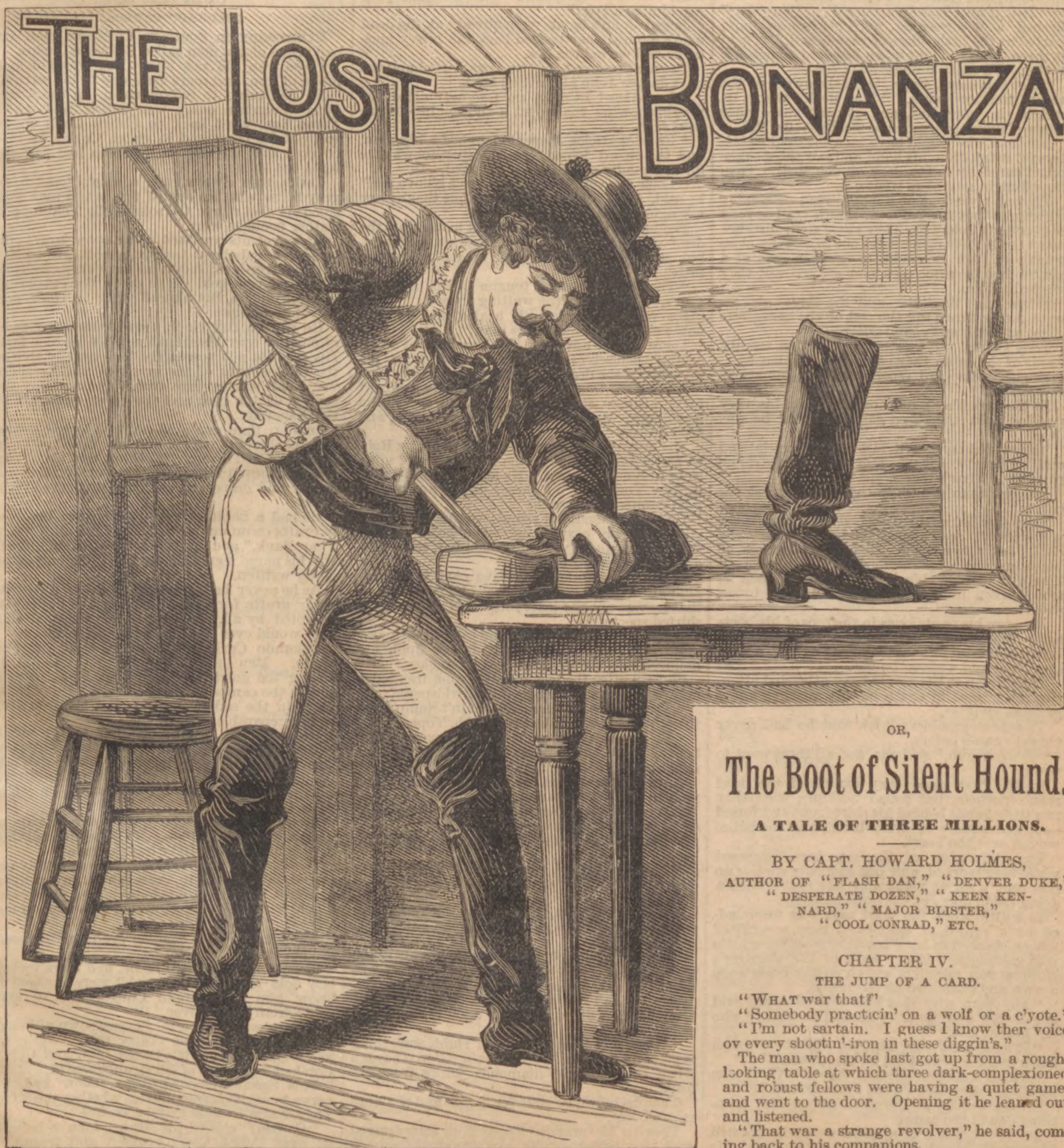
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THEN THE COLORADO SPORT INSERTED THE STOUT BLADE UNDER THE SOLE
AND WRENCHED IT LOOSE.

OR,

The Boot of Silent Hound.

A TALE OF THREE MILLIONS.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"DESPERATE DOZEN," "KEEN KEN-
NARD," "MAJOR BLISTER,"
"COOL CONRAD," ETC.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JUMP OF A CARD.

"WHAT war that?"
"Somebody practicin' on a wolf or a c'yote."
"I'm not sartain. I guess I know ther voice
ov every shootin'-iron in these diggin's."
The man who spoke last got up from a rough-
looking table at which three dark-complexioned
and robust fellows were having a quiet game,
and went to the door. Opening it he leaved out
and listened.
"That war a strange revolver," he said, com-
ing back to his companions.
"You heard nothin' at the door?"
"Nothin'."

The men went at the game again.

It was past midnight, and the light that illumined the interior of the mountain cabin was the only one to be seen in the mining-camp at that hour. The three men continued to play while the hours chased one another toward morning. There seemed to be a weird fascination in the game at which hardly a word was spoken; the occasional ring of coin on the table, and the emphatic throw of the cards made the only sounds that broke the silence.

At last the east grew light, and the gray flushes of another day stole in at the little window to the left of the door. One of the men reached for the lamp that burned on a shelf above the table, took it down and blew it out, with a remark that daylight was cheaper than oil.

The game stopped suddenly, the last winner raked in the final stakes, and another bunched the greasy cards and threw them up on the shelf that held the lamp.

When they struck, one card disengaged itself from the deck and fluttered back to the table.

"Look hyer!" laughed one of the men, holding up the card to his companions. "Ar' we to be haunted by this kerd?"

"It is the deuce of diamonds!" said another. "I reckon we've seen it before, Topaz."

"I should say we hev," was the reply. "Ef we war superstitious, we'd think this jumpin' from ther deck meant suthin'. I'll throw 'er back."

The man tossed the card toward the shelf, but instead of alighting there it struck the edge of the board and came back to the table.

"Tear it up! It is an accursed card anyhow!" flashed a new speaker, and his bronze hand darted at the little piece of pasteboard. "I held it three times to-night when I needed something better. I'll make finders ov it, for—"

"Not this morn, Onyx," said the owner of the cabin and the cards. "Thet deck's worth its weight in pure dust, and it can't spare ther deuce o' diamonds, much as we don't like it."

The man who would have torn the card to tatters let it fall from his hand and saw the speaker put it carefully in the deck on the shelf. Then the all-night gamblers went out.

The cabin was one of a long string of similar structures that fringed a mountain trail or road in Southern Colorado. They stood some distance apart, as if their owners did not like to be close neighbors, but it could have been seen at a glance that the same men had erected all; they were all alike.

It was just daylight, and the three players were the first men up; the rest of the camp was silent as death and sound asleep.

They started off together, but within twenty yards of the cabin they came to a sudden halt, and with one accord recoiled with exclamations of surprise.

In the street lay a man on his back; his very position told the three gamblers that he was dead!

"That shot we heard last night!" exclaimed one. "I told yer it war ther crack ov a strange revolver. Thar's ther result."

In less than a minute the men were at the corpse.

They saw before them the body of a large man, well-dressed, well-armed, and, although very dark of skin, handsome. He had a full mustache black as the eyes dimmed by death, shapely hands, and long black hair, which, when he stood erect, must have fallen over his broad shoulders.

He wore his pantaloons in the tops of his boots after the manner of the wild West, and the broad-brimmed hat that lay near by had a gold lace band and a silver buckle.

This person in life would have attracted attention anywhere; in death he was striking, and a genuine surprise.

The three gamblers knew that he had never come to camp before.

"Search him," said one, and all three went to work.

In the first place they examined the dead man's pockets, but found nothing; then they ran their hands behind his shirt front and found—a great square of dried blood, and the bullet wound over the heart.

The excitement of the searchers increased while they worked, and one suddenly sprang up and sent a shout right and left that opened a dozen cabin doors at the same moment.

In a little while the dead man was surrounded by a crowd of astonished men, several of whom claimed to have heard a revolver a little past midnight. Every part of the stranger's clothing was minutely searched; the boots were drawn and examined on the inside.

"The man who shot him robbed him," said one of the searchers. "He had an enemy who got him at last."

"It looks that way, captain. Mebbe the man has a mark o' some kind on his person."

"Thet's a good suggestion, Agate. We'll take ther body down ter Cuban Con's an' see."

Cuban Con's was the main saloon and gambling den of the camp.

Its proprietor was a small man who showed his Spanish blood in more ways than one. He was the only foreigner in the camp, and was

tolerated only because he kept the kind of place liked by the mountain roughs. The body of the dead man was picked up by four men and carried to Cuban Con's, followed by the crowd anxious to obtain some clew to the most mysterious affair they had ever heard of.

After a drink all around the examination was renewed; the corpse was laid upon the floor and stripped.

"See thar!" suddenly exclaimed one of the crowd. "Right over that g'lout's heart ar' a tattoo an' by Jupiter! it's ther deuce of diamonds!"

More than one man started at these words, and three immediately recalled the strange actions of the card in the cabin the night before.

The whole crowd leaned forward to inspect the singular tattoo on the breast of the corpse.

It looked as if a cord had been pressed into the skin, for the tattoo was the exact size of one, and the two diamonds were seen in dark-blue against a white skin.

Between the spots was the hole made by the ball which had taken the stranger's life, and it looked to the gold toughs as if the slayer knew where to find the tattoo before he shot.

There was no other mark on the body, and when the crowd drew back somebody covered it with the dead man's clothes.

"I noticed that he has a solid gold tooth," said some one.

One of the men went back and stooped over the body.

"Jasper John will have thet tooth out if it's true," whispered a miner. "Last night's play ran him to a hole."

Jasper John's hands were already at the dead man's mouth; they pushed back the heavy mustache and parted the lips.

The next moment the two jaws parted and the next Jasper John almost fell back.

"Jerusalem! he's got no tongue!" cried the rough, showing the crowd a thoroughly-frightened face.

"No fiddlesticks, Jasper!" laughed a big man, and the crowd joined in till Jasper John's face flushed madly and his eyes gleamed.

"Look for yerselves if yer don't b'lieve me!" he said. "I'll bet my vertebry that thar's nary a tongue in that head."

The big man went forward and looked into the dead stranger's mouth. The look startled him, but that was not sufficient; he put a bronzed finger in.

"Thar hasn't been a tongue in this head for years," he said to the waiting crowd. "Ther place whar it war hes all healed up. In ther name o' heaven who is this man?"

There was no answer. The men seemed to be asking themselves this same question, for the mystery of the dead man affected all alike.

Among the toughs stood a man who was about forty, athletic, straight as an Arab spear, and handsome. He looked like a leader of men, and such he was.

The mountain camps knew him as Ruby Rob; he had obtained fame in the Far East and notoriety in San Francisco. He had worn kid gloves in New York, and no gloves at all among the gold-camps of Colorado.

He had a splendid physique, was quick as a cat, and wore an easy-fitting silver-laced jacket, tight pants, and a wide-brimmed hat, much like a ranchero's sombrero.

While he had taken no active part in the examination of the corpse, it was plainly to be seen that he was not the least interested of the dark-shirted spectators.

He started slightly when the tattoo mark was discovered, and again when Jasper John announced that the stranger was tongueless.

Shortly after the last discovery he touched a man who was standing near and whispered:

"That deuce of diamonds didn't jump from the deck for nothing last night, eh, Topaz?"

"By the infernals, no!" was the answer. "I'll bet my head that it made its jump when that man's heart gave its last throb."

A smile appeared at the corners of Ruby Rob's mouth, but it was scarcely perceptible.

"Topaz, I am going to my shanty," he went on, "and I want that man's boots."

"His boots, captain? Why, we searched 'em—"

"Never mind. I want them!" was the firm interruption. "Bring them to me as soon as possible."

"You shall have them," was the reply, and with another glance at the dead man Ruby Rob withdrew.

His countenance changed several times between the saloon and his cabin. At one time it was fierce in look, at another soft, if not sorrowful. When he had closed the door behind him, he brought his fist down heavily upon the table and cried:

"What if it is so? If I am right, something is going to happen. The next time I won't laugh when the deuce of diamonds jumps from the deck."

Then he began to wait for Topaz and the dead man's boots.

True to his promise Topaz Tom soon arrived with the desired articles, and deposited them on the table.

"Captain, what's yer opinion about that man?" asked the tough.

"I have no opinion now, but I may have one before night," responded Ruby Rob. "Let me alone now; I want to inspect these boots."

Topaz Tom drew toward the door.

"Carlos has come," he said.

"Colorado Carlos, eh?" ejaculated Ruby Rob. "I'd rather not have him here just now, but let it go. What did he say when he saw the dead man?"

"He hadn't struck Con's yet."

"Then go and watch him, and watch him closely while he looks at the corpse."

"Do you think—"

"I have no thoughts," interrupted Ruby Rob, pettishly. "Go and watch the mountain Ishmaelite!"

In another moment Ruby Rob was the sole occupant of the cabin.

He sprang eagerly to the table and drew a Bowie as he picked up one of the boots. Then the Colorado sport inserted the stout blade under the sole and wrenched it loose.

"Nothing there!" he cried, throwing the boot away.

The second boot was attacked in the same manner, but this time the Colorado sport found beneath the heavy sole a flat object about an inch square, and wrapped in oiled silk!

His eyes glistened when he drew it forth and cast the boot away.

"Aha!" he cried, gazing at his find. "This is both luck and death!"

CHAPTER II.

COLORADO CARLOS.

EVERYBODY in Southern Colorado knew or had heard of the man called Colorado Carlos.

Those who did not know him by sight had heard of him, and more than one to his sorrow.

He had come to Satanscrown, as the straggling mountain camp was called, and when Topaz Tom went back to Cuban Con's under Ruby Rob's command to watch Carlos, he discovered that the suspected person had just entered the saloon.

Carlos who always rode a magnificent iron-gray horse with an eye of fire, was a man who stood six feet above the soles of the gold-topped leather boots he wore.

His garments consisted of an open jacket embroidered caballero fashion, a soft gray shirt with a silver-laced front, rather wide pantaloons with a narrow gold stripe down the outside of each leg and a hat almost white in color, and velvet in texture.

He wore a full black beard which the wind often blew over his shoulders when he rode fast. His eyes did not possess the look usually seen in the restless orbs of the pronounced desperado, yet, if all stories were true, this man was the coolest of the cool, and the most desperate of the desperate.

In more than one gold-camp Colorado Carlos was the hero of story, and the chief actor in some wild red drama. Nothing told about him was disbelieved; the most fanciful stories of his daring and desperateness found credence everywhere.

He had a habit of paying whatever he owed in drafts on an unknown institution called "Git-Thar Bank," and at the bottom of each draft was his name signed in dark red ink and excellently written.

As he never had occasion to draw these singular drafts for large amounts, the paper was accepted by all, but only a few believed that they would ever realize a dollar on them.

Colorado Carlos knew every camp in Colorado. Men saw him everywhere—to-day among the gulches of the Grand Mesa, to-morrow in the camps of the San Juan. He was always in the saddle, and he and the iron gray were inseparable companions.

He had been caught sleeping in the saddle within rifle-shot of camps that had outlawed him on general principles; he had ridden into mountain saloons and treated fifty enemies, paying for the treat in his famous orders on "Git-Thar Bank."

Because he took no pains to make friends he was called "Every man's foe," but for all this, he was not inclined to be quarrelsome.

To all outward appearances he was totally unarmed, but insult him, cross him in any manner, or refuse to take his much-circulated paper, and a gold-mounted revolver would leap from somewhere.

A quicker hand, a deadlier eye than this man's did not exist.

Nobody knew his real name, and there was no one bold enough to ask. All were content to know him as Colorado Carlos, and to keep away from his revolver.

He was well known in Satanscrown although he was not a frequent visitor there. He came and went whenever it pleased him, and Cuban Con had a good lot of his strange drafts.

This Spanish-blooded little fellow had the nerve to ask Colorado Carlos whether the "Git-Thar drafts" would ever be cashed.

"Cashed?" echoed the strange man as he leaned over Cuban Con's counter, and transfixed him with his wonderful eyes. "I'll pay them

dollar for dollar with compound interest. I'm a millionaire in prospect, an' don't you forget it!"

From that time Cuban Con invested in those drafts. He bought them wherever they were to be found, and always for a mere song, and before long the little whisky-dealer of Satanscrown was said to have orders enough to burst Git-Thar or any other bank.

Such was Colorado Carlos, the man whom Topaz Tom found at Cuban Con's.

The iron-gray stood with slack rein in front of the establishment quietly waiting for the man who was never long from the saddle.

Topaz Tom singled Colorado out the moment he crossed the threshold; the mountain Ishmaelite had not yet discovered the dead man on the floor.

"Hello, my saint of the chalice," exclaimed Colorado Carlos as he espied Cuban Con behind his counter. "What has happened since I left you last?"

The men present looked at the barkeeper and then glanced at the dead.

"We had a mysterious murder in camp last night," answered Cuban Con. "Over thar lies the victim, found at daylight in the street."

Colorado Carlos turned as the little man's finger pointed over the counter, and the next moment his eyes caught sight of the dead man.

"Found dead in the street, eh?" he said.

"Shot plump through the heart, sir."

"Dead when found, of course?"

"He war shot shortly after midnight, but war not discovered till daylight," returned Con. "We don't know who did it, and if it didn't look like a cold-blooded murder, we wouldn't keer a powerful sight. That man, sir, war an object ov pity; he has no tongue."

Colorado Carlos was startled by this announcement, but only one man of all the crowd saw it. That man was Topaz Tom, who was watching the strange sport with the eyes of a hawk.

"Go and look for yourself," Cuban Con went on. "Medicine Monte, who examined his mouth, says that it's all healed up, an' that, in all probability, he hasn't had a tongue for years. I never heerd ov a similar case afore, tharfore, I say that, in his unfortunate condition, that man war an object of pity."

Colorado Carlos stepped toward the corpse and pulled one of the loose garments from the rigid face.

"If he knows 'im he'll show it now or never," ejaculated Topaz Tom as he leaned forward breathless and with every sense on the alert. "I'll bet a hundred that ther captain thinks Colorado will know ther dead man."

The Git-Thar sport held the garment back and stooped over the dead. The crowd looked on, hoping that he would furnish them with a clew to the mute's identity, but he did not speak.

"Look what he's got over his heart, Colorado," suggested Cuban Con over his counter.

The mountaineer bared the breast of the corpse and saw the tattoo of the deuce of diamonds, and the bullet-hole between the spots.

He started at the sight and almost drew a cry from the one absorbed spectator.

"They hev met afore!" murmured Topaz Tom. "Captain Rob war no fool when he sent me ter watch this man."

In a little while Colorado Carlos re-covered the corpse, and came toward the crowd congregated at the counter.

"Had he nothing on his person by which he could be identified?" he asked, looking across the counter at Cuban Con.

"Not a paper—not a mark."

"Who found him?"

"Three ov ther Jewels, I b'lieve—Topaz Tom, Onyx Oll and Cap'n Rob."

"At daylight?"

"A little after; but thar's Topaz himself."

Topaz Tom was not anxious to be confronted by Colorado Carlos, but the last words had scarcely left Cuban Con's lips ere he found the Git-Thar sport before him.

"You found that man?" inquired Carlos.

"I war with ther boys."

"Do you think you were the first to find him?"

"I don't know; ther body looked as if it had not been disturbed since ther shot."

"You heard that?"

"Yes."

"When was it?"

"A little past twelve last night, as nigh as I kin get at ther time. That's all I know."

Topaz Tom did not like this inquisition, which threatened to be both lengthy and searching. He had never had any good feeling for this well-dressed vagabond sport, and he resolved to show him that he could not compel him to submit to an examination.

"You would know a good deal more if I wanted to press you," retorted Colorado Carlos, a sudden flashing of his eyes betraying his spirit. "What are you going to do with the dead man?"

The question was addressed to the crowd at large.

Cuban Con replied that it was intended to give the body decent burial; the man was unknown and friendless, and as such, was entitled

to sepulcher among the few dead who occupied the little cemetery belonging to Satanscrown.

"After the burial what?" asked Colorado Carlos. "Are you going to try to discover who killed him?"

The question seemed to surprise the group.

Cuban Con, speaking again for all, said that had not been thought of. It was a rule that Satanscrown should take care of her own, and as the dead man was not a citizen, he had no claim on the camp.

Colorado Carlos did not continue the subject but called the crowd up and treated all. As payment, he threw upon the counter not one of the famous drafts on "Git-Thar Bank," but a golden eagle, which drew audible ejaculations of wonder from the spectators.

"Gentlemen," said Carlos, with a smile, "I hev the pleasure of announcing that the bank has commenced business."

There was a general laugh at this, and the next moment the hand of the Git-Thar sport threw a dozen eagles toward the ceiling.

"The boss bank and the biggest out of doors," he went on. "I am cashier, president and board of trustees—all in one."

"Whar is it?" asked Topaz Tom.

"Whar you will never cash a check!" cried Colorado Carlos, whirling at the question.

Topaz Tom drew back with lowering brow.

"Thet's ter be tried," he grated, under his breath. "Thar ar' men hyer who'd cash chips on Satan's counter ef he owed 'em."

Colorado Carlos did not wait to quarrel with the growling sport, but turned and leaned over the counter toward Cuban Con.

"Whar are the dead man's boots?" he asked.

"On his feet or by them, I guess," was the reply.

"They are not."

Cuban Con was going to appeal to the crowd, when the sport's look stopped him.

"Say nothing," he said. "I will find those boots. I must have them; they are worth their weight in gold to me, and to somebody else."

Topaz Tom did not hear these words.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET OF THE BOOT.

SATANSCROWN, as has been said, was a straggling camp. It was nearly a mile in length with Cuban Con's saloon in the center and the cabins of the gold roughs on either side.

It had had an existence of some years prior to the events that open our story, and its inhabitants had supported themselves by mining here and there, for the mountains had many rich pockets, and in some places gold was to be had for the picking up.

Not far from Cuban Con's, on the right, stood a cabin that did not differ from the others in outward appearance, but inside it was not the same.

An appearance of neatness indicated that it was the dwelling-place of a member of the gentler sex; and such it was.

Satanscrown had one "angel" at least, but those who knew her best called her Nugget Nell, as if she had no other name.

Not a young girl, although still beautiful, this woman had a history which had never been retailed over the glasses at Cuban Con's bar.

It was known that Ruby Rob was her best friend—that when she came alone on horseback to Satanscrown one night, she inquired for the good-looking sport, and that, when he saw her, his eyes kindled, and he seemed delighted to see her.

To the men of the camp he said that she was "the sister of a friend long since dead," and that he was now her protector, and woe to the man who offered her the insult of look or word.

Nugget Nell forthwith took up her residence in the camp. She could shoot, sing, play, and throw a bowie between a man's fingers at twenty paces.

Now and then she let drop sentences which caused some of the miners to doubt that she was the woman whom Ruby Rob had called her.

She knew the camps of Colorado and the gold-placers of California. She could speak Spanish fluently, and Cuban Con was wont to say that she knew more about Santa Fe than he, and that place had been his home.

As the months rolled on, Nugget Nell became somewhat of a mystery to Satanscrown. She seemed to like the camp, and some of the men took kindly to her.

She was rather tall, with bright black eyes, and an exquisite figure. It was apparent that her youthful beauty had been dazzling, but a wild life and wilder associations had taken it and given her in its stead a darker beauty with an abandon that was fatally attractive.

Before she was in camp six months, Ruby Rob, who seemed to be master there, had promoted her to the position of "Mistress of the Roll."

Every evening at six o'clock six men would march in a body to the little square in front of Cuban Con's, where they would halt and stand shoulder to shoulder with heads erect, and amused and expectant.

In a little while Nugget Nell would leave her cabin and advance toward the six. On these occasions she was always richly dressed, and over her shoulders, mingling with her black hair,

would fall the gold-fringed end of a scarf that fairly glittered in the sun.

She would halt before the six stalwart men, one of whom was Ruby Rob, and the next moment her voice was calling the roll.

As each name was mentioned, its owner would advance a step, halt and salute the woman, and at the close of the brief roll-call, the six stood nearer to her than before.

Then, at a signal from Ruby Rob, all would take off their broad-brimmed hats, and send up a rousing cheer for Nugget Nell, who would smile and go back to her cabin.

A scene like this was Satanscrown's six o'clock entertainment. It had gone on with monotonous regularity for three years! Winter and summer alike, in rain and storm, in sleet and sunshine, the Mistress of the Roll would speak the names of the six jewels of Satanscrown.

We name them here: Ruby Rob, Topaz Tom, Onyx Oll, Agate Alf, Diamond Dave and Jasper John.

If this daily routine grew irksome to the other inhabitants of the camp, they did not complain. What Ruby Rob did was law there, and with five such men at his back, fault-finding was not to be thought of.

Now let us go back.

Just an hour after Ruby Rob had discovered the little object in oiled silk under the sole of one of the dead stranger's boots, he was seen to enter Nugget Nell's cabin.

The woman at the time was reclining on a couch which had traveled many miles to afford her the pleasure of rest, but when the door opened and admitted the boss of Satanscrown, she sprang up and reached him at a bound.

"Who died last night?—tell me!" she exclaimed.

"How do you know anybody did?" asked Ruby Rob.

"I saw a dead man carried into Cuban Con's."

"You see everything, Nell."

"No; if I did I would see the lost girl of Golden Gate."

The sport laughed, and thrust his hand into an inner pocket.

"What will you give for what I hold in my hand?" he exclaimed, holding his right hand tightly closed before the woman.

"I don't know. What have you got?"

"The bonanza clew!" was the reply.

"You cannot fool me. Ruby Rob, I would not give you a smile for the contents of your hand. We don't find gold-clews in Satanscrown; you know that."

"But I have found one, all the same," and Ruby Rob opened his hand and disclosed the "find," seemingly in the same state as when he took it from its singular hiding-place.

"What is that?" asked Nugget Nell, curiosity in her eyes as she leaned forward. "I don't see any bonanza in that little thing."

"Let me show you. Why, it is a regular god-send, woman! Fortune is playing a matchless hand for us. The man who died in his boots last night has opened the doors of the Lost Bonanza."

While Ruby Rob talked he was unwrapping the little pocket, and at the end of the oiled silk he found some paper covered with writing. He glanced up through his long black lashes to see that Nugget Nell was watching him almost breathlessly; then he opened the paper.

"Heavens! a picture!" cried the woman, and her hand darted upon the little tin-type that lay in Ruby Rob's palm, and a moment later her eyes were devouring it at the window.

The picture was about an inch square, and showed the face of a child about ten years of age.

It was the portrait of a little girl with large eyes full of almost womanly expression, yet the eyes of a child withal.

Nugget Nell looked a moment and her lips met firmly.

"Where did you get this?" she cried, wheeling upon Ruby Rob.

"Found it," replied the sport, with a smile.

"That is no answer. I don't suppose anybody sent it to you."

"Pardon me, but they did."

"Whom?"

"Death!"

"Come! I am burning with impatience. Where did you get this picture?"

"I pried it out of the dead man's boot."

Nugget Nell let slip an exclamation of surprise.

"How did you know it was there?"

"That makes a little story," answered the boss of Satanscrown. "One year ago, when I was in Frisco, I went to the best hotel in the city. It was then the Palace Occidental. In the evening I was approached by a boy who touched my sleeve and asked if I was Colorado Carlos. I had a beard like him then, you know. On the spur of the moment I told the boy that I was Colorado, and I expected an adventure of some kind. Instead o' that, the kid slipped a bit of paper into my hand, and disappeared. Ten minutes later I found that the Ishmaelite was in the same hotel."

"But the paper—what did it say?" exclaimed Nugget Nell impatiently.

"Only this, and I can repeat it word for word

"I am going on the hunt again, this time among the camps of Colorado and Idaho. I carry the face in my mind and *under my feet*. If you should find me dead you will know where to look for it. It takes a silent hound for a dark trail. I am a silent hound."

Ruby Rob stopped and looked into the woman's eyes.

"Was that the message?" she asked.

"That was all."

"You did not give it to Carlos?"

"I should say I didn't," smiled the handsome desperado. "I thought I had a clew to the bonanza girl, and ever since I have watched for that Silent Hound. He came to camp last night, but he was followed. Somebody killed him here. He was a silent hound, because he was tongueless. When that discovery was made, I would have bet a thousand that I had a clew to the sender of the message I have just repeated. We had already searched the corpse without finding anything. Then a sentence of that message flashed across my mind: 'I carry the face in my mind, and *under my feet*.' What did the last words mean, but that somewhere in his boots was an important clew? I had the dead man's boots brought to my cabin, and under the sole of one I found the portrait and the paper covered with writing. Now we have but to put our hands upon the girl of Golden Gate."

"This is more than luck!" cried Nugget Nell.

"It is Providence at work for us!"

"I don't know," smiled Ruby Rob, shaking his head. "I hardly think Providence would help us in this game, Nell."

"It is fortune, then, but give me the paper. Let me see what the Silent Hound has to say."

She reached out and took the paper from Ruby Rob's hand and went to the window.

"A scholar wrote this," she said after a glance, and then silence filled the little cabin while she read to herself the following strange sentences:

"I am the Silent Hound of California, and this is the longest trail of my life. The picture within this paper is the portrait of Kate Lossing, the only child of Major Louis Lossing, who set out from Frisco over land for St. Louis on the 3d day of May, 1869. He was accompanied by his daughter and two servants and a guide. He never reached St. Louis. At a certain place in the mountains he was killed one night, and his child and the three men disappeared. His wagon was found months afterward abandoned in a gulch; the horses were never found. Major Lossing was worth more than a million. In a will left in Frisco, before he set out on his last journey, he willed it all to his child, then ten years old. I saw the will written, my name is appended to it as a witness, and I swore—I had my tongue then—to see that the girl was not cheated out of her rights. If her father died on the fatal trip. Kate, the child, she is a young woman now if living, and I believe she is—never claimed the vast estate. I lost my tongue in a manner needless to describe here, but let me say that it was in Major Lossing's service. I believe that the girl was carried off by the three men who persuaded Lossing to make the journey. I have devoted eight years to the search for Kate Lossing; she cannot be in the hands of the three, for nobody has brought her forward to claim the estate. Has she forgotten her parentage? I will not believe it! I am now on the trail of a young woman who is said to be in a gold-camp in Colorado. There are three camps to be searched—Satanscrown, Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch. If I die without my mission accomplished the finder of this paper will take the trail where I leave it. If I find Kate Lossing I will turn on those who made me the Silent Hound of California, and they shall discover that there is death in the still dog's bite!"

The woman who read this singular paper seemed to linger over the last sentence. Ruby Rob, who had watched her all the time, was anxious for her to speak.

"The still dog will never bite," she said with a smile when she looked up.

"That is true, but he brought his dangerous teeth to camp. It was a narrow escape."

"Who killed him?"

"I don't know. Somebody, perhaps, who wanted the portrait and that paper. The Frisco bonanza is worth playing for. We have it at our fingers' ends at last."

"How?"

"There were three camps for him to search. He believed that Kate Lossing is in one of them. If he came from the south he made this his first camp. See the order in which he mentions them: Satanscrown, Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch. The heiress of the Golden Gate is not here; we know that, Nell. Then, she is at Trigger Bar or Tartarus Gulch."

The woman sprung toward Ruby Rob with a cry of exultation.

"So near! I can hardly realize this! Have we found the gold-trail at last?"

"That's no mistake!" exclaimed Ruby Rob. "The Silent Hound spoke in death. I would like to know who killed him last night, but we won't stop to ferret that out now. I am eager to lay my hands on the Bonanza Queen of the

Gold Coast. But, there is one thing I don't like. Colorado Carlos is here."

"I don't like a hair of his head!" said Nugget Nell between her teeth. "It is singular that he should come at this time."

"It may be a coincidence. He never discovered, I think, that I got his message in Frisco. But let me get ready for my trip. I will leave to-night, and I will come back successful!"

Five minutes later Nugget Nell was alone, and Ruby Rob was in his own cabin when its door opened.

The leader of the Six Jewels started when he saw the man who came in.

It was Colorado Carlos.

"I'm almighty glad to find you at home, Captain Rob," was the mountain Ishmaelite's greeting. "I want the boots of the man who died in Satanscrown last night."

CHAPTER IV.

SPORT AGAINST SPORT.

THERE was a threat and a challenge in the eyes of one man, defiance in those of the other.

The demand coolly spoken by Colorado Carlos sent a thrill to Ruby Rob's heart, and drove him back almost to the wall of the cabin.

The dead man's boots lay where he had tossed them after the examination, and the shadow of the table falling into the corner prevented the gold-laced Ishmaelite from seeing them.

Ruby Rob's first thought was to blurt out, "You sha'n't have them!" and to follow the reply by the drawing of his revolver; but a second's reflection and a look into the depths of the eyes that transfixed him changed the proposed tactics.

"Want a pair o' boots, eh?" said the boss of Satanscrown, smiling, as if the demand was preposterous. "I beg leave to inform you, Colorado, that this cabin ain't the storage-room for dead men's effects."

"Do you mean to say that the boots did not come here?" asked Colorado Carlos, not at all put back by the desperado's reply.

"What did I say?"

"I understood you perfectly, Ruby Rob, but I am here for them boots, an' I want 'em!"

At that moment the hand of the mountain Ishmaelite was suddenly lifted and Ruby Rob looked across the table into the muzzle of a cocked six-shooter held in the steady hand of a man who flinched for nothing.

"The boots!" continued Colorado Carlos.

"What ar' they worth to you?"

"No difference how much. I will have the boots, or a life!"

That was plain enough. Ruby Rob bit his lip under his big mustache.

"This man must be humored," he said to himself. "The boots look all right at first glance. He will have as soon as he gets them, and with the shanty door between us, I will have the upper hand. I'll see to it."

"I don't see what particular value a dead man's boots ar' to you," he said to Colorado Carlos. "Sooner than have a difficulty you shall have all the boots I have in this trap. Don't you want mine, too?"

"Only those belonging to the dead man," was the response.

Ruby Rob leaned toward the corner that contained the stranger's boots and picked them up. As he bore them toward the light, he managed to press down the soles which his bowie had pried open, and then with an assumed careless "hyar they ar'," he extended them by the tops toward the exacting sport.

Colorado Carlos gave the boots a searching glance and then looked at Ruby Rob.

"I want the whole outfit," he said.

"What's that?" cried the camp boss, feigning great astonishment.

"You know without asking me, Captain Rob," said Colorado Carlos, slowly as the eyes of the two sports met. "You know that I would not come here after a dead man's boots if they had no more value than the leather they contain. To be as plain as I can, I want what you found under the soles."

A hand seemed to clasp the little packet at that moment under Ruby Rob's shirt and very near his heart.

"What! give up to this mountain vagabond the mute's secret, the portrait of the lost heiress of the Golden Gate? It was like taking a pound of flesh from the gold-camp desperado."

The second demand was worse than the first.

"I'll be hanged if I do it!" blurted Ruby Rob.

"No; you'll be killed in your tracks—that's all," was the quick reply.

Ruby Rob frowned and looked the man over once more. The stranger's boots had fallen from the hand of Colorado Carlos, and formed a confused heap at his feet. He had discovered that the soles had been tampered with, and he seemed to know what had been abstracted.

"This man has the scent of a fox and the eye of a hawk," muttered Ruby Rob. "I would give a thousand if Topaz or Onyx would open the door, or twice that amount if I had the drop on him!"

But his pards did not come, and he was at the mercy of a man who looked almost merciless.

All at once Ruby Rob thrust a hand under the bosom of his dark-gray shirt. His fingers touched the little packet, but there he hesitated.

Colorado Carlos did not speak, but all the time his eyes were looking over the leveled revolver.

"I found this under one of the soles," said Ruby Rob producing the miniature and its paper covering, the whole carefully wrapped with the oiled silk as he had found them. "I haven't had time to examine it, consequently I don't know what value it ar' to you, or anybody else."

Colorado Carlos seemed to know that Ruby Rob was falsifying, and a smile appeared at the corners of his mouth as he reached his hand forward for the packet.

"I don't care about that," he said. "I only want what the dead man carried in his boot, or between foot and sole."

"Thar you have it," said Ruby Rob relinquishing the prize for which a few hours before he would have given all his wealth and a good deal of his blood.

He saw the fingers of the mountain Ishmaelite close about it, as if the touch delighted him, and the next moment he saw it no more.

Colorado Carlos stepped back and was speedily at the door.

"The man killed last night had an unknown enemy," he said to the boss of Satanscrown.

"Who ever that enemy war, he found him," Ruby Rob answered.

"I have a fancy that that foe was looking for the very pocket you have just given up. If he still wants it, he can find it with me."

"You knew the dead man, then?"

"I did."

"What was his name?"

"He was called the Silent Hound of California."

Ruby Rob gave a slight start.

"Beyond this I will not go," continued Colorado Carlos. "I might turn the tables and ask you how you came to look under the boot soles of the dead, but I think I know."

The captain of the Six Jewels could not suppress the exclamation that sprung to his lips.

"Aha! I'd like to know what you think!"

"About a year ago a message intended for me fell into the hands of some one else. It happened in Frisco in the lobby of the Palace Occidental. You need not say that I am wrong, Ruby Rob. I stand before the man who got my message."

Ruby Rob's only reply was a smile which with the twinkle in his eyes confirmed the Ishmaelite's accusation.

"It was a sleek trick, Captain Rob, and one which other men have played before," Colorado Carlos went on. "I did not find it out till long afterward, and if it had not been for this episode of the dead man and his boots, I should not have mentioned it. However, it is all right now; but if I had discovered the trick that night, we would have broken the monotony of life at the Palace Occidental."

A light laugh supplemented the speaker's last sentence, and suddenly dropping the revolver, he tipped his big hat to the astonished sport, and was gone before his departure could be believed.

Ruby Rob caught a glimpse of an iron-gray horse beyond the door of the cabin, and saw a man seat himself in the saddle.

He went forward with gleaming eyes and a curse struggling up his throat.

"This is the coolest trick I ever saw played!" he ground out between his teeth. "I'll have the dockments back in three minutes!"

He threw the door open with his left hand, and appeared in it, a heavy revolver clutched in his right.

The mountain Ishmaelite was already gone, and down the road that ran the whole length of the gold-camp was a cloud of dust, which marked his trail as truly as if the man himself was seen.

"I've hit men after dark; why not in a cloud of dust!" cried Ruby Rob.

The following moment he threw up his hand and felt the trigger, when a loud "Hello, cap'n!" greeted his ear.

The exclamation came from a dark-faced, long-haired man of splendid physique, and Ruby Rob dropped the revolver and turned toward him.

"I'd have given a thousand, Onyx Oll, if you had been ten minutes earlier," he said, as the man came up.

"You've been visited by Colorado Carlos, eh, cap'n?"

"Visited and robbed!" flashed the boss of Satanscrown.

"What did he take?"

Ruby Rob hesitated a moment, but all at once he caught Onyx Oll's wrist and almost dragged him into the cabin.

"It war all about the dead man's boots," he continued. "One of them war worth its weight in gold ten times over. Thar they lie—not worth a picayune now."

"Why, I searched 'em when they was pulled off," said Onyx Oll, eying the two boots on the floor.

"You would never have found their secret," laughed Ruby Rob.

"I knew whar to look and I found it. It consisted of a picture and written paper. They fell into the hands of Colorado Carlos just afore you came."

Onyx Oil threw a fierce look beyond the door and down the street.

"The heiress of the Golden Gate is nigher than you think, Onyx. The man who died in Satanscrown last night was the Silent Hound of California; he was hunting the Bonanza Queen."

"Tell that to the hills!" laughed the listening sport.

"I tell it to you and swear that every word is true!" and Ruby Rob solemnly threw up his hand. "The Silent Hound expected to find her in one of three camps—Satanscrown, Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch. Colorado Carlos will master the paper and take up the hunt. He must be beaten at this game he has begun."

"By heavens! he shall be. The heiress isn't hyer of course."

"No; then she must be at Trigger Bar or Tartarus Gulch."

"He can't reach both camps at once."

"Thar's whar we have 'im!" exclaimed Ruby Rob. "I intended to go alone until he played this unexpected and dazzling hand. Let me map out the programme. I will take Agate Alf and Topaz Tom and break for Trigger Bar; you and Jasper John will go straight to Tartarus Gulch we will leave Diamond Dave behind to play any necessary hand here. There is two million in this game, Onyx. We must be swift and certain."

"What if we run across Colorado Carlos?"

"The mountain Ishmaelite must be killed on sight!"

"By Jove! it is a big game!" cried Onyx Oil. "We'll git thar!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND STRANGER.

TRIGGER BAR and Tartarus Gulch, the two gold-camps were fifty miles apart and a long distance from Satanscrown.

As it was late in the day when Ruby Rob and his pards set out for them, it was impossible for the best horse in the mountains to reach them before the next day.

These two camps were to be searched for the missing heiress of the Golden Gate. Colorado Carlos was to be forestalled, if possible, and the girl was to be found before he could put his hands upon her.

The mountain Ishmaelite had the portrait taken from its hiding-place under the Silent Hound's boot-sole, and with it he could identify the lost heiress although the picture represented her in her childhood. In this respect he commanded an advantage over the Jewels of Satanscrown, but as Ruby Rob had issued orders that Carlos should be killed on sight it was likely that he would not hold the picture long.

Diamond Dave was left behind, to "keep the camp straight," as Ruby Rob said, with a smile, on leaving, but, in reality, to play any hand that circumstances might demand.

When the shadows of night closed again about Satanscrown, several men, headed by Diamond Dave, took the corpse of the stranger and buried it on the mountain-side, where half a dozen little mounds told the story of as many violent deaths. There was nothing impressive about the funeral; a grave was made in a hurry and the body lowered into it with a show of ceremony. A few shovelfuls of earth completed the work, and the tough sextons in gray shirts went back to drink over their labors at Cuban Con's bar.

The little whisky-seller, with Spanish blood in his veins, was anxious to know why Ruby Rob and four men had so suddenly deserted Satanscrown. He drew Diamond Dave to one side and put the question.

"Bizness o' some kind, I reckon," was the reply.

"Why didn't you go?" pressed the yellow-faced man.

"Didn't hev ter," said Dave.

"You won't tell me anything, eh?"

"Got nothin' ter tell."

Cuban Con bit his lips. He knew better than that; he believed that Diamond Dave knew the secret of the pards' departure; he knew but would not tell; that was it.

At nine o'clock that night Cuban Con turned his bar over to a man who sometimes clerked for him, and went out. He was still in the dark about Ruby Rob's schemes, and the mystery almost crazed him.

Satanscrown was still, and the moon was shining here and there. The boughs of the few trees visible seemed asleep, for their leaves had no motion, and Cuban Con could almost have heard the tread of a coyote.

He went to his own shanty, which was near the saloon, and entered, closing the door behind him. Without striking a light he found two revolvers in a leathern belt, which he buckled about his waist, then he went to the door and stepped out.

The next moment Cuban Con halted before the door of his shanty, and his eyes told that they saw something startling.

A few yards from the shanty, and across the

road that ran through Satanscrown stood the figure of a man which had just come upon the scene.

Cuban Con stood in shadow, but the stranger was in the moonlight, and the proprietor of the whisky den had a good view of him from head to foot.

He saw that the camp's visitor was about the medium hight, not very compactly built, and tolerably well dressed.

His face appeared smooth and thin, but his hair was long and lay over his shoulders. Cuban Con could not see the expression of the eyes which were shaded by the sombrero-like brim of a hat with a wide band and two tassels.

"That man was never here before," murmured the whisky-seller while he stared at the motionless person. "He comes to Satanscrown at a time that makes one suspicious. A man was killed by some unknown person last night in this camp; the victim was unknown, too; he had the deuce of diamonds tattooed over his heart, and he had no tongue. I'd like to know who you ar', stranger, an' by heavens! I'm goin' to!"

Cuban Con was certain that the stranger had not seen him, so he leaned toward his cabin door and drew on his boots without noise. All the time he kept his eyes riveted on the person in the moonlight.

When the stranger started off, the Spanish-blooded tough almost leaped up; the little man limped slightly as if from a hurt in one of his limbs.

"I knew a limpin' man once, but it was years ago, an' he died since then," said Cuban Con to himself. "He limped just like that man out there; he was about his size, too. We used to call him Colonel Tarantula, and he was as poisonous as that spider. I'm going to follow him. Something mighty important fetched that man to camp."

The limping stranger kept down the street, and Cuban Con followed him through the shadow of the cabins which he kept at his right hand.

"I've followed men before, an' I've got the art down to a science," he ejaculated. "You can't play any new hand here to-night. I'm almost willin' to call you Colonel Tarantula's ghost, but—Hello! Thar's a woman in the play, eh?"

At that moment the stranger was crossing the street toward the cabin occupied by Nugget Nell; he kept his eyes on it as he advanced.

The whisky-seller stopped and hugged the front of the cabin at his back. He did not lose a single movement made by the man he watched.

Straight to the woman's home went the stranger, and Cuban Con saw his hand move upward to the latch of the door.

"He knows who's in thar!" said Con. "That man would drop in his tracks ef Cuban Con wer' Ruby Rob."

A moment's silence followed the click of the iron latch and the door was opened. As the figure of the stranger disappeared Cuban Con took a great bound forward, but quick as he was, he did not see the meeting inside, nor hear the exclamation of the woman who forced her visitor.

Nugget Nell had been taken by surprise.

The stranger had found her on the low cot but half asleep; his entrance had startled her like an electric bolt, and when she saw him in the light of her lamp she went to the wall with a gasping cry of "My God!"

The beautiful black eyes of the gold-camp Cleopatra seemed to start from their sockets; she showed her visitor a countenance frightened into pallor, and while she shuddered his eyes laughed.

"I thought I'd startle you," he said coming forward. "You didn't think I'd run you down."

"No."

The answer was spoken without the least effort on the woman's part.

"You thought I war dead, eh?" the man went on.

"Yes."

"The dead come back sometimes," he laughed. "The monster that digs our graves has been beaten more than once by Colonel Tarantula."

A man on the outside of the cabin uttered an exclamation at the pronunciation of this name.

"By Jupiter! it is the colonel himself," he said and the next moment he drew a bowie-knife and held it along his sleeve. "Woe to me if this man discovers that I am here. He is as deadly as the spider for whom he is named. Policy forces me to make this visit to Satanscrown his last."

Then Cuban Con elevated his eyes above the rough sill of the window near the door and saw the occupants of the cabin.

"I don't want you now," said the man as he faced the woman whose features his flashing eyes seemed to burn. "I believe you haven't lost much beauty since—but I won't open the past. It wouldn't be agreeable to you just now, and besides, I haven't time to talk about it."

The woman looked relieved; if there was a subject she wanted the man to keep silent on it was that of the past.

"What do you want, then?" she said.

"The solid truth," was the answer. "Where is Ruby Rob?"

"Gone away."

"What is his destination?"

Nugget Nell hesitated. To tell this man, that would be to open the story of the murder and the secret of the boot.

"You don't want to tell me, I see," smiled Colonel Tarantula. "I am going to stay here till I know."

He stepped back and seated himself coolly at the little table.

"There was a man killed in Satanscrown last night," he went on.

"Yes, and you killed him!" cried Nugget Nell springing forward so suddenly that the man gave a slight start. "Your presence here tells me this as plainly as though I had seen the death-shot fired. I know you! Great God! I ought to, I should say!"

Instead of a frown, a smile broadened on Colonel Tarantula's face.

"You'd make a good detective," he said. "I haven't been in camp an hour before I am accused of killing a man. This is doing things up quick, I say. But let us go back to my subject. Where did Ruby Rob go? I believe you did not answer the question as I put it before."

"And I may not answer it now," said Nugget Nell.

"You may answer others before a Frisco court if you do not."

"Do you threaten me?"

"If that was a threat, yes!"

A moment's silence reigned in the little cabin. The blaze of the lamp quavered between the pair.

"Am I to be answered?" asked Colonel Tarantula. "Remember! I want the truth. They call you Nugget Nell here; it's an improvement on your other name which I always thought—"

"Do not speak it here!" interrupted the woman, darting forward as if she would place her hand over the man's lips. "Spare me the hearing of a name I have not spoken for months."

"Then," said the man sternly, "then, I must have the truth. Where is Ruby Rob?"

"He went to Trigger Bar."

"On business?"

"On business."

Colonel Tarantula who had drawn back, now leaned forward again.

"What did he find on the dead man's person?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"But if the Silent Hound of California had not died last night, Captain Rob would not have gone to Trigger Bar. You know that, woman. Go on."

"What do you want me to say?" asked Nugget Nell, as she began to think that her secret was safe.

"All you know, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or you go to Frisco and face the men who want you there!"

This time the woman's lips met firmly.

"You will have to take me to Frisco," she said in a voice that seemed to deceive her persistent visitor. "Ruby Rob doesn't tell me his secrets. I had no right to ask him what took him to Trigger Bar. Here I am! If you think I have lied you can take me to Frisco. I am at your mercy."

Colonel Tarantula looked disappointed; he left the stool and stepped back.

"You don't know what took Ruby Rob to Trigger Bar, eh?" he said.

Emboldened by her success Nugget Nell threw up her hand.

"Do you want me to swear it?"

"Oh no," laughed the colonel. "A woman who would play the game you once played in Frisco will do anything. I won't press you further, but I want you to know that from this time on you are liable to hear often from Colonel Tarantula, the man with the death sting. Tell Rob I war here when he comes back. I don't care. You say I killed the Silent Hound last night. Maybe you couldn't prove it before a court of justice woman, ha, ha, ha!"

His eyes were fixed on the Colorado Cleopatra while he laughed, and the next moment he was gone!

"Won't somebody kill that man for me?" leaped from her lips as she started toward the door.

"I'll kill him for myself," grated a man who hugged the cabin wall outside.

Colonel Tarantula was already several yards from the cabin, and in the moonlight.

The person who spoke last leaped forward noiseless in his stockings.

A wild bound carried him across the space, and something glittered in the hand he threw toward the heavens.

"You came hyer to die, Colonel Tarantula!" he hissed.

The next instant the little man whirled; he had the quickness of the young tiger-cat.

Cuban Con did not see the spellbound woman in the cabin door, but he did see the face that confronted him, and he felt the fingers that held the wrist of the hand that clutched his bowie!

"Ha, ha! you didn't have to speak before

you struck," cried Colonel Tarantula. "I know you now though I haven't seen you for years. There! put up that bowie and come with me. I'm as dangerous as I used to be."

CHAPTER VI.

A FORCED SALE.

COWED by the eye that seemed to possess a potent spell Cuban Con let his hand drop and the next moment he was walking alongside the man he had attempted to kill.

The owner of Satanscrown's whisky den, though not very tall himself, was taller than Colonel Tarantula. He was that worthy's superior in physical strength, but he knew that the colonel's grip was like a vise for even after it had been relaxed he seemed to feel the skeleton fingers at his bone.

Nugget Nell watched the two men until they were lost among the shadows of the cabins.

"I could have told Cuban Con that the man is as quick as a cat," she said as she withdrew into the cabin and took a small but dangerous-looking revolver from beneath the pillow of her couch. "I've had an unpleasant experience with him, and I'm likely to have another unless somebody drops him in his boots before he leaves camp. He would not hesitate to take me back to Frisco, and I have said that I will never go back there of my own accord. Cuban Con knows him; he must have listened at the window. The next time he deals with Colonel Tarantula he must strike before he speaks. One must not rouse the lion he would kill."

Meantime Cuban Con and Colonel Tarantula were walking toward the saloon.

"Where do you live?" suddenly asked the colonel, looking up into Con's face.

"We are hyer now," said the Spanish-blooded sport, designating a cabin on his right by a wave of the hand. "Shall we go in?"

An eager light lit up the speaker's eyes when he put the question; the thin-faced man did not seem to notice it.

"Certainly," he said, with a bow. "I am here to see you, remember. We will go in."

"And by the eternal gods! my man, you will come out dead!" grated Cuban Con as he turned toward his cabin.

The two men reached the door at the same time, and the whisky-seller of the gold-camp opened it for his companion to enter.

"We need a light here," the colonel remarked and Con soon produced one which revealed the interior of the cabin.

"Sit down," continued Colonel Tarantula, taking a seat himself near the roughly made table that stood in the middle of the small apartment.

Cuban Con obeyed.

"My time hasn't come yet," muttered the saloon-keeper. "This man knows me. When we last separated he said solemnly that he would kill me on sight. I am sure he hasn't forgotten that."

The restless eyes of Colonel Tarantula told that he was just then remembering something that maddened him.

"We haven't met since we parted on the Llano," he said, suddenly.

"No," said Cuban Con.

"You had me then, you and your men. You left me for dead under a Texan sun, and my last words were an oath, to kill you on sight. You haven't forgotten this, Cuban Con?"

"I'd like to know how a fellow could with you hyer in the flesh," was the answer, at which the colonel's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Do you think I have forgotten?" continued Tarantula.

"No."

"I never forget anything, and that scene—that brutality—has never left me for a moment since my restoration to consciousness, but you see, Cuban Con, that I have not killed you on sight."

Cuban Con made no audible reply, but he said to himself:

"I was quite right; this lean-faced devil intends to pay me for lassoing him on the Llano."

"What are you doing here?" suddenly asked Colonel Tarantula.

"I am running a whisky-ranch."

"What is it worth?"

"I don't know. I never invoice."

"Is it worth a thousand dollars?"

Cuban Con almost laughed. His stock of fixtures and fiery liquor worth one thousand dollars? Their real value would not exceed three hundred. Did Colonel Tarantula intend to buy?

"Estimate your stock," said the colonel, in a careless, off-hand way.

"Do you want to purchase?"

"Yes."

Cuban Con thought a moment.

"What if I don't want to sell?" he said.

"But you must!"

"That's almighty queer. I'm doing a good business hyer, and I prefer keepin' on."

"I should think that a man who was to have been shot on sight would jump at the chance to sell out."

There was a meaning in these words that made the Spanish sport start.

"I'll give you a thousand for your trap," continued the little colonel with the glittering eye, and before the astonished listener could reply, a bag of coin dropped from somewhere upon the table. It came down with an emphasis which told Cuban Con that there was at least a thousand in it.

"Am I obliged to sell?" he asked.

"You are."

"When do you take possession?"

"Right away! You will go with me to the saloon and announce to the customers there that a sale has been made, and that Colonel Tarantula, from Texas, is henceforth its proprietor."

"This beats my time all to pieces," exclaimed Cuban Con.

"I thought it would," smiled the colonel. "Having made the sale, I will go down and take possession."

Cuban Con looked through his long lashes at the man who talked with a coolness that was exasperating.

"I can't get a chance at him hyer. I've got to put it off," he said to himself. "I'd give my new thousand to know why he wants to own my trap."

Colonel Tarantula had left his stool with his last sentence, and the whisky-seller followed his example.

"You need not refuse the payment, Con," laughed Tarantula, as the Spanish sport's eyes rested on the bag of coin. "I don't pay in drafts on Git-Thar Bank. I deal in the genuine stuff."

Cuban Con picked up the buckskin bag, and looked toward the door. At that moment he thought he saw a face with two shining eyes disappear from the window; but he may have been mistaken.

"We go down to the saloon now," said the colonel, and the pair went out into the moonlight, and turned toward Cuban Con's place, which was only a few steps away.

The door was open, and about the half-dozen little card-tables scattered over the room sat the evening *habitués* of the mountain whisky-den. A few stalwart fellows stood along the counter, showing their broad shoulders and bronzed faces to Colonel Tarantula before he reached the door.

"You will announce the sale," he said in a low voice to Cuban Con as they neared the place.

The Spanish sport inclined his head and stepped across the threshold. Those who looked up saw who it was, but the next moment all had seen the thin-faced stranger, who although no giant, was a man to attract attention anywhere.

"Gentlemen," said Cuban Con, halting before the counter, and speaking in a voice heard by everybody in the saloon, "I hereby announce that this place has changed hands, and that it now belongs to Colonel Tarantula, of Texas, the gentleman on my right!"

The men at the tables sprung up.

Among them was Diamond Dave, the man left behind by Ruby Rob to see that nothing went wrong in Satanscrown during the absence of the pards.

His eyes from the first became fixed on Colonel Tarantula, who had drawn his wiry little figure to its full height, and appeared to assume some pomposity over his new acquisition.

Transferring his gaze from the Texan for a moment, he fixed it on Cuban Con.

"This sale has some mystery about it," Diamond Dave said, under his breath. "I'll bet my head that Cuban Con had no notion of selling an hour ago. And what makes that Colonel Tarantula so anxious to become proprietor of this place?"

"Walk up, gentlemen, and drink with the new owner of the ranch," said the colonel at that moment, and without a second invitation the entire crowd went toward the counter. "I have yet to become acquainted with your favorite poison, but we'll call it all good and drink accordingly."

He was behind the counter while he spoke thus, and the next moment the toughs of Satanscrown had half a dozen long-necked bottles placed before them.

Diamond Dave managed to nudge his way to a place at Cuban Con's elbow and with a glance downward at the Spanish sport he managed to whisper.

"In Old Nick's name, what does this mean?"

"I don't know," answered the whisky-seller, glancing furtively at Colonel Tarantula, who seemed to have overlooked him altogether.

"Don't know why you sold out, eh?"

"Oh, I had ter do that."

"Because he said so?"

"Yes."

Diamond Dave glanced at the lean-faced Texan.

"Is he really Colonel Tarantula?" he asked.

"I never knew him by any other name."

"Thar's some mystery hyer."

"Thar must be. He was to see Nugget Nell."

Diamond Dave gave a sudden start.

"He threatened to send her to Frisco unless—" At that moment Colonel Tarantula glanced toward Cuban Con; the glance broke his sentence.

"Unless what? be quick about it!" whispered Ruby Rob's pard.

"Unless she told him what took Captain Rob to Trigger Bar," replied Cuban Con.

"Did that man do that?"

"He did."

Diamond Dave reached out his hand and took the glass which had been pushed toward him, then he poured it half full of liquor and catching the colonel's eye, tossed it above his head and gulped it down.

"I'm off, but I'll be heard from soon," he whispered to Cuban Con. "A man like that doesn't make a trade of this kind for nothing."

The door was within arm's reach of the speaker, and a moment later he glided out with a strange light illumining the depths of his eyes.

"I war left behind to play a bad hand if anything happened," he said to himself. "I guess I'll have to play one for something has happened. The devil has come ter camp by way of Texas."

Diamond Dave did not remain long in the moonlight before the saloon; he dashed away, but soon came face to face with a woman who seemed to spring from the ground.

"The very man I want!" exclaimed the woman, who was Nugget Nell.

"And I want you, too," cried Diamond Dave, seizing her wrist. "The new proprietor of the ranch back thar—who is he?"

"Colonel Tarantula."

"That is what Cuban Con has told me. He was to see you?"

The camp Cleopatra recoiled a pace.

"Yes," she said, and then she caught Diamond Dave's hand and went on. "I can't stay here while he is with us. That man is my evil genius. I accused him of killing the tongueless man last night, and he did not deny it. He is our worst enemy; he is more our foe now than Colorado Carlos. Diamond Dave, will you do me a favor? I never asked one yet at your hands."

"Name it," said the rough.

"Go back and kill that man! You don't know him. I do! He is interested in the heir-ess of the Golden Gate."

"That settles it!" said Dave between his teeth.

CHAPTER VII.

DIAMOND DAVE'S MATCH.

RUBY ROB's lieutenant turned and looked toward the saloon as he spoke the short and decisive sentence.

If Colonel Tarantula was interested in the heiress of the Golden Gate, that settled his fate.

"You will do it?" asked Nugget Nell, who read death, as it were, in the eyes of the man before her.

"That's what I've said, but tell me one thing first."

"Well?"

"Cuban Con says he threatened to drag you to Frisco."

"He did."

"What for?"

The camp Cleopatra hesitated, turned pale and let her hand fall from Diamond Dave's arm.

"Ah! you don't like to tell, I see," smiled the sport. "Mebbe it's none o' my business, but I couldn't help askin', you know. You don't want to go to Frisco?"

"I do not."

"Then I guess you sha'n't!" was the answer.

Nugget Nell took a breath of relief as if the reply assured her that there was to be no more inquiry into her aversion to San Francisco.

"You can go back home," continued Diamond Dave. "I will see this Texas cyclone."

"You must make no preliminary plays," said the woman. "As I have told you, I know that man. He is quick and deadly. He is no giant in stature, but he has the strength of a lion, and a grip like a vise."

"Just as if I haven't dealt with such fellows in my time!" laughed the tough. "Are you goin' to your shanty, or do you want to see the settlement?"

"I'll go back," was the reply.

Diamond Dave walked toward the saloon while Nugget Nell resought the little cabin which had been her home for more than a year.

"I'd give a mountain of gold if I had it if that man was dead," crossed her lips without the least effort. "He will do what he threatened if he takes a notion. But I have a champion who will make a bold play for my deliverance. I had but to tell Diamond Dave that Colonel Tarantula was interested in the big bonanza. That sent him off as I thought it would."

She reached her cabin, entered and shut the door, but a moment later she appeared at the threshold with an eager face and fixed her gaze on the front of Cuban Con's saloon which was visible from her cabin.

Meantime Diamond Dave had gone back and entered the whisky den. He found the same crowd at the counter, and a glance told him that the new proprietor had been free with his stock in trade.

Cuban Con had moved to a position behind the counter where he was explaining to Colonel Tarantula the various kinds of liquors in the

ranch, and in other ways familiarizing him with his new purchase.

All the time there was a lurking tiger in the Spanish sport's eye, and when Diamond Dave caught Cuban Con's glance he saw that his return was welcomed.

"I've concluded to settle down, gentlemen," said Colonel Tarantula looking at the crowd. "I've roughed it here and there for many years, but now I'll rest awhile and keep you supplied with the elixir of life."

"Ever run a ranch afore, kunnell?" sung out a big fellow.

"Somewhat," answered Tarantula with a smile. "I'm no novice in any thing. Shall I give you a sample of what I can do for pastime?"

"Don't keer ef yer do."

Colonel Tarantula thrust one hand into his pocket and took out several gold-pieces, then he drew a revolver and came from behind the counter.

"One at a time, kunnell? thet's no trick in Satanscrown."

"All at once," said the Texan and the next moment he sent the gold-pieces toward the rafters of the place.

The revolver went up as they struck the planks, and then came three shots in such swift succession that they seemed but one.

Every piece was struck. The pards of Satanscrown looked astonished into each other's faces.

Then the colonel took another piece and sent it rolling toward the furthest end of the room.

"I'll hurry it along," he said; the revolver flashed and the bullet striking the milled edge, caused the coin to disappear instantly.

Cuban Con and Diamond Dave exchanged glances over this shot.

"This man is no infant," muttered the saloon-keeper.

Colonel Tarantula came back to his place behind the counter and looked at the Spanish blood.

"What time do you close?" he asked.

"Oh, whenever the boys get tired," was the reply.

"Do they play late?"

"Sometimes all night."

"I'm here to accommodate my customers," smiled the colonel. "You will stay in Satanscrown, of course?"

Cuban Con made no reply. He remembered the oath that he was to be killed on sight, but here the man who had taken it had bought him out and spared his life. He looked into the colonel's eyes and tried to get at the real meaning of the last sentence.

"I may take a notion to go away," he said at a venture. "You have no objection, I suppose?"

"You will not quit this camp without my authority," was the response, spoken in a low tone, but emphatically for all that.

Cuban Con bit his lip but made no answer.

The gamblers who had been interrupted by Colonel Tarantula's coming had gone back to their games, and the greasy cards were falling again upon the several tables that stood here and there in the room.

The lamps, there were four of these, showered the room with light, and their rays falling beyond the open door where they mingled with the mellow moonlight of the street were seen by the anxious watcher in the cabin near by.

Sullen and watchful, with one of his big bronzed hands near the butt of one of the deadliest six-shooters in Colorado, Diamond Dave stood near the end of the counter ready to play a fatal game on the man who had turned up so unexpectedly.

He knew that Nugget Nell was waiting for his report, and he was burning with eagerness to deliver it and in language that would thrill and delight her.

At no time had the Satanscrown sport caught Colonel Tarantula secretly watching him, but he was confident that the Texan had seen him at the end of the bar.

All at once the colonel turned toward Diamond Dave, and then came forward with his black eyes fixed upon him.

"Thar shall be few words," said Ruby Rob's guard between his teeth, when he saw this movement. "The first drop is the best one in this game."

There was no suspicion in Colonel Tarantula's eyes, although they glistened as he approached the Satanscrown sport; his look, to some extent, disarmed Diamond Dave.

"You're one of the Six Jewels, they tell me?" he said. "What has become of the other five?"

The words came like a shower of grape from a cannon at close range.

Diamond Dave showed his teeth like a disturbed jackal, and at that moment connection was made between hand and revolver.

"D'yer have to know?" he asked, insultingly.

"Oh, no; it's not particular," laughed the Texan. "I'd like to become acquainted with all the citizens of Satanscrown. As I've come here to stay—"

"To stay?—you?" interrupted the rough.

"Why not, Diamond Dave? When did you become boss here?"

Diamond Dave's hand rested on the edge of the counter, but he was about to remove it with a step backward, when the colonel's fingers closed about his wrist.

"Let me go on," continued the Texan, leaning forward till his eyes seemed to burn the astonished desperado's cheeks. "I shall be a lamb till you make me a lion; a fly till you transform me into a scorpion! It is for you to say whether I shall get along here. I know the drop games as they are played from Austin to the Black Hills. My present business in Satanscrown is to wet the throats of your pards with the vilest tarantula-juice that ever filled a glass. Let me alone. Your eyes have watched me ever since I came here. If you want to know anything about me, ask the woman who has been made Queen of Satanscrown, Nugget Nell."

The grip of the long fingers relaxed, the Texan's hand crept back like a serpent after a spring, but his eyes did not drop.

Diamond Dave seemed thunderstruck; his right hand clutched the butt of his revolver, but the weapon was not drawn.

Cuban Con, only a few feet away, was without color and was holding his breath. The collision fully expected by him had not taken place. Diamond Dave had not killed the man from the llano.

As Colonel Tarantula drew back, the Satanscrown sport was seen to move.

"I'll get him from the door," said Diamond Dave under his breath.

The next moment he was going out.

"Good-night," called Tarantula after him, and the big sport thought he detected a tinge of triumph in the tones.

He threw a glance over his shoulder.

"Now! he doesn't see me," he muttered.

With teeth set close, he whipped out his revolver and wheeled. It was the work of a half-second.

Cuban Con, who had been watching for something of this kind, saw the movement and recoiled to the shelves.

"Hands up!" suddenly cried Colonel Tarantula, and before Diamond Dave could lift his hand, he saw the Texan's eyes glittering behind a cocked revolver.

If he was quick, Colonel Tarantula was quicker.

The ex-barkeeper uttered an exclamation that drew the attention of all in the room.

"Hands up!" repeated the lean man from the llano.

"Show your palms, Diamond Dave, or I'll kill you in your boots!"

Caught by the cool man who was his superior in agility, the Satanscrown sport was forced to elevate his hands. His teeth seemed to crack as he did this; rage darkened his face, and his eyes seemed on fire.

It was the first time he had ever been caught thus.

"About face and forward," said Colonel Tarantula. "If you want it war, war it shall be! I am a lamb till you make a lion of me, I have told you!"

"You came here on a secret mission," snapped Diamond Dave.

"Let the future prove it, then," was the reply. "I am now Colonel Tarantula, proprietor of this ranch."

"They say you killed the man who had no tongue!"

The spectators started visibly at these words.

"Is that your charge, Diamond Dave?" asked Tarantula. "Do you put it in here?"

"No."

"Who makes it, then? Is there a man in Satanscrown who will say that I killed the man who died here last night?"

Silence fell over the crowd, but the new owner of the whisky ranch soon spoke again.

"I am willing to be tried on that charge," he said, looking from Diamond Dave to the crowd. "Impannel your jury and produce your witnesses."

"I can fetch one," the sport said.

"Bring him here. Now, about face—march! Go and get your witness, Diamond Dave. I understand that the charge has been made. I am accused of having killed the man who had no tongue. I demand a hearing before these men."

Diamond Dave saw that the last sentence was intended to end the wordy duel. He looked at the crowd and then once more over the leveled revolver held in the skeleton-like hand of the man from Texas.

"Hang me, if I don't make it lively for him!" he grated, through his set teeth. "I'll get a witness whose word will outweigh his solemn oath. The men of Satanscrown dare not reject the evidence of Nugget Nell."

He was in the moonlight of the mountain street when he uttered these words, and his face was already turned toward Cleopatra's cabin.

"Tricked for once in twenty years," he growled again. "What will she say when she sees me?"

Nugget Nell was still waiting for the desperado's report, and he found her where we saw her last, in the doorway of her cabin.

When she saw him coming she sprang

forward with a cry and stopped him in the street.

"Why didn't you come sooner?" she cried. "I heard the shots, four of them. You—"

"No! I haven't got him yet," interrupted Diamond Dave. "He is still boss of the ranch back thar, but he's laid a snare for himself. We'll have a hangin' in Satanscrown afore mornin' if you'll only do your duty."

"I?"

"Yes. All you have to do is to face Colonel Tarantula and swear that he killed the man without a tongue."

Nugget Nell's look instantly became a stare and her face grew colorless.

"My God! I can't do that!" she gasped, and then fell, in a swoon at the mad sport's feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUNTED BY THREE.

WE transport the reader to Trigger Bar, one of the two camps to be searched by Ruby Rob and pards for the heiress of the Golden Gate.

Like Satanscrown, it nestled among the mountains of Colorado, and had for its inhabitants the usual sort of people found in the gold-camps of the Northwest.

Trigger Bar was "exclusive," that is, it never troubled anybody, and did not like to be disturbed. It had a standing notice that no Chinese would be permitted in the camp, and it was also expected that visiting white men would not stay long.

The gold-camp was not as large as Satanscrown; its fifty cabins were "bunched," and did not straggle along the mountain like the shanties of the camp we have just left.

As all such places have a boss or prominent man, Trigger Bar was not behind the times in this respect. Its head character was a lank fellow of forty-five, who, because of his extreme desperateness, was contrarily called Pious Phil.

This man "ran the camp" in a mild manner, from the character he had; but all knew there was fight in his blood, and that elsewhere he had committed the most unprovoked crimes.

Trigger Bar was not Satanscrown's neighbor, but the men of the last-named camp knew its location, and were well acquainted with the peculiarities of its inhabitants.

There was one person at Trigger Bar, however, of whose presence Ruby Rob did not know.

This person was a youthful-looking individual not more than nineteen, with a faultlessly formed and beardless face, and deep-blue eyes. The figure, too, was perfect, and the countenance, always mild and girl-like in expression, looked out of place among the bronzed ruffians of the gold-camp.

Another youth, a little older and more manly in looks, also occupied Trigger Bar, but he worked in the mines near the camp; the first described youth did not work.

Pious Phil was going from his cabin to the nightly resort of the miners of Trigger Bar, when he saw three horses halt before the main whisky-shop of the camp.

This was an incident most unusual, and from the first enchainned the miner's attention.

He saw that the riders of the three steeds were powerful men, that they had ridden a long distance, and were sports or gold-seekers like himself and the men who occupied Trigger Bar.

They had ridden from toward Satanscrown, but Pious Phil did not think of the distant camp at that moment.

It need not be said that the three men created a sensation when they entered the cabin saloon. All eyes there at once became riveted upon them, and the miners wondered what had brought the trio to camp.

"I guess we got ahead of Colorado Carlos," said one of the three, with a smile. "The mountain Ishmaelite must have checked up somehow."

They drank at the bar, but not until they had invited the not very backward spectators to take something at their expense.

"This is Trigger, eh?" the apparent leader of the three said to one of the men who marched forward at the invitation.

"This ar' Trigger Bar. Ever hyer afore, stranger?"

"Never."

"Goin ter stay a while, ain't yer?"

"We may rest here several days. We are goin' up inter ther Shasta country."

"Shasta, eh? I'm from thar," said the miner.

"That's good. Maybe you can give us some information about the lay of the land in Shasta—when we want it."

The pard of Trigger Bar did not notice the singular emphasis of the last words, but assured the stranger that he was a regular encyclopedia of information pertaining to the Shasta country and that he was willing to impart it all for nothing.

The leader of the trio was our old acquaintance, Ruby Rob; his companions were Agate Alf and Topaz Tom. As to the meaning of their visit to Trigger Bar, the reader need not be informed.

Just outside the saloon, whose door was open,

for the night was pleasant, stood the angular figure of Pious Phil. He had not lost sight of the Satanscrown pards since their arrival in camp, and he was now watching them like a hawk while his ears were taking in the conversation between Ruby Rob and the miner.

All at once Pious Phil turned on his heel and walked from the saloon. His eyes snapped under the influence of some strange excitement, his fallow skin seemed flushed.

He did not speak till he reached a certain cabin whose door he pushed open and entered.

A young man, dark-eyed, well-built and handsome, sat at a table where, with eyes shaded with a piece of bent pasteboard, he was tracing a diagram on some paper.

"Idaho, wake up! Somebody has come ter Trigger Bar," said Pious Phil, and at the sound of his voice the young man looked up with a question at his lips.

"Who has come?"

"Three men."

"What are they like?"

"They are big fellows with big hats, high boots, and ride tip-top hosses."

"Well? what do they want?"

"I heard one o' them tell Gold-dust Jim that they war goin' on ter Shasta, but his eyes and his voice told me that thar warn't a bit o' truth in what he said."

"Then, you think—"

The young man halted and looked at the long sport.

"It looks that way," said Pious Phil with a smile.

Without another word the youth rolled up his diagram, and laid it on a shelf above the table, then he turned to Pious Phil again.

"Where are these men?" he asked.

"I left 'em at Rustling Rube's."

"Did their horses look fresh?"

"Not very; those fellers have come a long way."

"Pious Phil, nothing must happen to the occupant of the middle cabin," said the young man anxiously. "I want to see these men before I act."

"We'll go down an' take a squint at 'em," was the reply.

The two men went out and found the three horses still in front of the gold-camp saloon, and Pious Phil, after a look, told Idaho Ivan that the new-comers were still in the ranch.

The young man glided forward and, protected by the horses, looked in upon the scene. He saw two of the visitors at the counter, but the third and the one whom he would have selected as the leader was talking to Gold-dust Jim over a rough table and a formidable bottle.

Pious Phil watched his companion narrowly during his scrutiny of this scene; he saw the youth's eyes dilate and drop, he saw his lips close and his fingers sink into his palms, as it were.

"Phil?" suddenly said Idaho, without taking his eyes from the scene.

"I'm right hyer, boy; what is it?" and the youth felt the long sport at his side.

"I want two horses. Can I take yours?"

"Sartainly. You could take a thousand if I had 'em," was the answer. "But what think you ov Trigger Bar's visitors?"

"I've seen enough of them! Those men are never going to Shasta. They are here for a purpose; they are looking for Mountain Moss."

"Is that yer opinion, Idaho?" exclaimed Pious Phil as his eyes suddenly kindled.

"It is."

"Then, by the souls ov the saints! they never get further than Rustling Rube's!"

With the utterance of the last sentence came the click of a revolver lock, and Idaho Ivan turned upon the man at his side.

"No; you don't want to force events," he said, laying a hand on the sport's arm. "Give me two horses and let the three men yonder find Mountain Moss if they can. I have seen the man who is talking with Gold-dust Jim. Any man who has spent any time in Satanscrown knows Ruby Rob after once seeing him. That man take a sudden notion to go to Shasta? I would as soon expect to hear of him bound to Patagonia."

"From Satanscrown, eh?" exclaimed Pious Phil.

"If Ruby Rob hails from there his companions do, of course. They will show their hand before they are six hours in camp, but Mountain Moss must not see them play it."

"Take the hosses, but whar will yer go?"

"Let me answer you some other time," was the reply.

"Tell Mountain Moss that it's got ter be, that Ruby Rob an' pards hev come ter camp, lookin'—no! Thunder an' swords! what am I sayin'? Tell 'er what you please, Idaho. Good-by."

Idaho Ivan glided back to his own cabin, but did not remain there long. When he came out he looked like a person who had suddenly equipped himself for a journey. A Winchester was slung over his back, and his pantaloons had been stuffed into his boots; besides this, there were spurs at his heels.

He went straight to a cabin that did not differ from its neighbors exteriorly.

Instead of lifting the latch without authority,

he rapped lightly and the door was opened by some one on the inside.

Idaho Ivan went in and greeted the youth with blue eyes and the girlish face.

"I was not expecting you, Ivan, but you are welcome all the same," said the occupant of the cabin.

"I come on strange business," began the young man. "We are going away."

"We?"

"You and I."

"When?"

"To-night—now!"

The speaker's look and the seriousness of his voice brought the cabin's tenant forward.

"What has happened? Your words imply that we must become fugitives."

"That's very nearly it," was the reply. "Pious Phil is watching them now."

"Watching whom?" exclaimed the person before Ivan.

"The three men from Satanscrown."

Mountain Moss drew back, and in the horror that settled over the fair face, proclaimed beyond doubt her sex.

"I am in your hands," she said. "Whatever you consider best I will do without a murmur. I understand that those three men are looking for me. Why? What crime have I committed that I should be hunted? Who am I above any one else that I should be disturbed when I am happy here? Whither do we go, Ivan?"

"First to Tartarus Gulch," was the reply.

"They may follow us!"

"Not while Pious Phil lives," said the youth with emphasis. "He would have walked into Rustling Rube's awhile ago and shot the three dead on sight if I had not prevented. Are you ready?"

"I will be ready within five minutes."

"I will rejoin you at the end of that time."

A moment later Mountain Moss was the sole occupant of the cabin.

"Three men want me! Oh! what does it all mean?" she exclaimed. "Idaho Ivan will do the best he can, and Phil will stand between me and any danger that threatens."

She went to the wall behind the table and took from one of the logs a square piece of wood about an inch in diameter.

"I will leave this behind," she said, slipping a plain gold ring from her finger and hiding it in the opening made by the removal of the bit of wood. "There is no telling what is to happen."

The allotted five minutes were soon up, and Mountain Moss met Idaho Ivan with a smile when he came back.

The two went to the western confines of the camp, and the youth opened a cabin door and went inside. In a minute, however, he came out again leading a horse; it was followed by another animal, and both were saddled.

Mountain Moss was soon upon the back of one, and the young man was about to give the signal to start, when she uttered a light cry and pointed away.

"Who is that man?" she whispered. "Is that your Ruby Rob?"

Idaho Ivan felt his revolver and leaned forward.

"Oh! I've seen him before," he said, laughing lightly. "It is Colorado Carlos!"

CHAPTER IX.

SHOT ON SIGHT.

THE mountain Ishmaelite looked colossal to the young pair as he occupied the saddle in the moonlight and almost in the very center of the trail that led to Tartarus Gulch.

He sat bolt upright like a mounted Cossack on guard, and seemed to be looking beyond Idaho Ivan and Mountain Moss.

"Is there no other way?" whispered the girl.

"I don't like that man. He sits between us and Tartarus; his presence here means evil for us."

"Colorado Carlos harms only his enemies," said Idaho Ivan. "We are going to pass him and he shall see us, too. Come. Keep on my right, and he will not see your face."

The two rode forward and straight at the man on horseback.

"Hello! what's this?" suddenly exclaimed Colorado Carlos, as if until that moment he had not seen the fugitives.

He leaned forward as he spoke, and his left hand seemed about to catch the young man's bridle-rein.

"I am Idaho Ivan. I have seen you a dozen times," was the reply.

"Your friend?"

"This is my fellow pard, Mountain Moss. We are going down to the Lode Star Mine in which we have an interest."

Idaho Ivan looked like a person who was telling a straight story, and the piercing eyes of Colorado Carlos were fastened upon him while he spoke.

All at once he glanced at the girl. Her face was shaded by the boy's hat and the strange sport moved his head to one side so as to see her better.

"Mountain Moss, eh?" muttered Carlos.

"My pard in the Lode Star Mine," said Idaho Ivan.

"I guess you do," was the answer, and the mountain Ishmaelite looked toward the grouped cabins. "This is Trigger Bar, eh?"

"Yes," said Ivan.

"Anybody strange thar?"

"Three men have just come."

An eager light leaped up in the sport's eyes.

"Go to your mine," he went on. "I hope it'll turn out better than mines are doin' now-days."

Mountain Moss almost uttered a cry of joy. Her hand, white and well-shaped, caught up the rein, and at that moment the Ishmaelite saw it.

"Mountain Moss, did you say?" he said, throwing a quick look at Idaho Ivan. "A man-miner never has a hand like that. This pard is a girl!"

Mountain Moss recoiled with a gasp that seemed to whiten her face, and Ivan threw forward his horse to keep back the hand of Colorado Carlos.

"Let my friend alone!" he said menacingly.

"Though you be every man's enemy, and powerful and desperate, you shall not touch him without my consent."

"Sha'n't eh?" laughed the Colorado sport.

"If your friend is the person I want, I have a right to say whether she shall go to Lode Star Mine."

Idaho Ivan darted forward and struck back the hand about to dart at the young girl.

"Keep cool, boy!" said Carlos threateningly.

"There is more than one game going on in Southern Colorado to-night. You don't know who you cross when you oppose me. I am called every man's foe, and I guess I've won the title."

"You touch my friend at your peril!" and before Colorado Carlos could prevent he was looking into the muzzle of a leveled six-shooter.

"You won't shoot anybody," he laughed between his teeth.

"You don't want to try me!" cried Idaho Ivan.

"I want to see your friend, though. I've got a document that is worth its weight in diamonds."

"I don't care if you have fifty. You don't touch Mountain Moss."

"Mebbe you want a little toning down," flashed the sport, and his hand flying up suddenly caught Ivan's pistol wrist. "I am quicker than mad lightnin' you see. Look hyer, Mountain Moss, as they call you; look me squarely in the face. I'm looking for a girl like you. By heavens! it is the very face I want. Say, you're worth a cool million; you're worth your weight in gold ten times over!"

Mountain Moss shrunk from the big sport who leaned forward and spoke thus. Meantime, he held the youth's wrist rendering him powerless, and his other hand seemed ready to fly at the girl.

Suddenly he cooled down. "If I let you go on to the mine will you come back?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Ivan.

It was anything to get away from Trigger Bar; the three men from Satanscrown were the terror that forced the falsehood to the youth's lips.

Colorado Carlos straightened in his saddle and dropped the youth's hand.

"Go. I don't take much stock in the mine story, but when I want you I will know who I'm looking for. You had better not stop at the mine if it does exist, and you don't want to go to Tartarus Gulch, either. Mountain Moss you call her here, I see. She isn't called that on the papers I've got."

"What do you mean?" cried Idaho Ivan.

"No difference. Go to Lodestar or where you please. Take good care of Mountain Moss, Idaho Ivan. I hold you responsible for all that happens her. You don't want to go to Tartarus Gulch. Remember that."

Idaho Ivan would have spoken again, but the big sport's horse bounded forward and the next moment he was beyond speaking distance.

Mountain Moss was the first of the astonished pair to speak.

"Is that man mad?" she asked looking at her companion.

"I have always regarded him as a strange admixture of sanity and madness," said Ivan who was staring at the sport. "If he has the documents he spoke of, by Jove! I'd like to see them! We must not follow him."

"I don't want to," said the girl. "If the three men who came from Satanscrown have eyes like his, I don't care about going back."

The well-known figure of Colorado Carlos had already disappeared, and the young couple rode on in an opposite direction.

The mountain Ishmaelite went into the camp at a gallop and drew up in front of Rustling Rube's beyond the open door of which were the harsh voices of men.

All at once there rung out on the night air the sharp report of a heavy revolver, and Colorado Carlos leaped from his saddle and pitched to the ground!

The shot came so sudden and without warning that the bar-room voices grew still. Somebody ran to the door and saw a big man rise from the ground and try to plant himself firmly as if to resist the attack of some foe.

"They've got the old man, but not for keeps!"

this person said. "The orders must hev been thet I war ter be shot on sight an' all because I took a picture an' a letter from Ruby Rob in Satanscrown. Shot on sight, but not killed!"

The open door was filled with excited men by this time, and one or two had recognized the person talking and swaying to and fro in the moonlight.

Suddenly Colorado Carlos came toward the saloon. He held a cocked revolver in each hand, his eyes had the glare of a tiger's, his hat was missing, his long hair was tangled, and his shirt-front presented a horrible sight of freshly spilled blood.

The crowd in the door, desperadoes though they were, drew back in horror.

He looked at the miners and laughed defiantly as he crossed the threshold.

Some one said aloud, "They got him!" and Colorado Carlos wheeled and singled out the speaker.

"Got who?—me?—not much!" he exclaimed. "I'm worth all the men ever planted in their boots in Colorado. I'm still every man's foe, and no man's pard. While the eagle flies an' the waters run, I will live to trigger the men who play games ag'in' justice. Walk up hyer, gold-bugs ov Trigger Bar, an' take yer tarantula juice."

Under no circumstances would a Trigger Bar crowd refuse a treat. Colorado Carlos leaned against the counter and showed his teeth in a grin as the stalwart fellows came forward.

"Shot on sight! Don't I know it?" he went on.

"They just left hyer," said a member of the crowd.

"Three ov 'em, I hear," answered Carlos.

"They were goin' ter Shasta."

"Ter hades!" roared the mountain Ishmaelite.

"Men ov Trigger Bar, I want ter say—"

At that moment some one exclaimed, "Pious Phil!" and the wounded sport turned toward the door.

The lean-faced boss of the camp had just entered the saloon, and already the eyes of Colorado Carlos were fastened upon him.

The mountain Ishmaelite set down his glass and went forward.

"Pious Phil, I'm glad you've come," he said, still eying the lean alcalde. "Send every man out o' this room. Do it at once—Rustlin' Rube an' all. I want ter see yer."

There was a strangeness in the sport's look that took Pious Phil's attention. He looked at the crowd and the man behind the counter, and ordered the room to be cleared.

"Out we go, Phil!" sung out half a dozen voices, and the whole forty rushed pell-mell toward the door.

The last man to depart was Rustling Rube, the proprietor of the place, and he shut the door behind him.

"It feels like there's a hole in my breast big enough ter run yer fist in," said Colorado Carlos. "The man who made it was Topaz Tom. I saw him as he threw up his hand. The orders were ter shoot this mountain chick on sight. I don't want a place ter die in, Pious Phil, because I'm not goin' ter take my chips ter death's counter just yet. We ar' alone here, and I want ter whisper one sentence in yer ear, for I've watched yer off an' on for five years, an' thar's more than one good streak through yer bad. Listen to me now."

Colorado Carlos leaned forward and his mustache touched the lean sport's ear.

"I've found the missing heires of the Golden Gate!" he said.

Pious Phil sprung back as if he had heard the click of a revolver. The scared face he showed Colorado Carlos made the big sport laugh.

"You have not!" he cried. "That is one of the eternal mysteries of the Gold Coast and the red Northwest."

"Mebbe I don't know," said the wounded sport. "Mebbe I couldn't show a picture that you'd recognize on sight; mebbe I haven't got the last written words ov the Silent Hound of California."

"Who is he?" asked Phil.

"The man who was murdered in Satanscrown the other night—the silent tracker who was on the right trail when the bullet found him, the—"

Colorado Carlos stopped suddenly, and Pious Phil saw his hand quake and open and close as if controlled by pain.

"I've—got—ter—rest—a spell," he said, growing pale.

The boss of Trigger Bar saw him move back along the counter, and threw forward his hand to catch him. But Colorado Carlos was too quick for him, for suddenly throwing up his hands he turned half-way round and reeled across the room.

A wild cry pealed from Pious Phil's lips; the door flew open in an instant and the shut out crowd rushed in.

Colorado Carlos fell heavily across one of the tables almost crushing it to the floor, and the next moment the toughs were around him.

It was a scene which never had happened before at the Bar although the wildest and bloodiest games had been played there.

"Well, how is it?" asked a handsome man, who leaned from a saddle toward an indivi-

dual who came from the direction of Rustling Rube's.

"It warn't a death-shot as you know, captain, but the bullet got him in the long run."

The listener's eyes were seen to glisten.

"He is dead, then?"

"Colorado Carlos is dead!"

"With the paper and portrait on his person?"

"Somewhar, but not whar Trigger Bar will find 'em. The Silent Hound hid them in his boot an' you kin bet yer life that Carlos don't carry 'em in his pocket. Did I shoot too quick, captain?"

"Not according to my commands, Topaz. We'll wait till they bury the mountain Ishmaelite and then we'll get the clew to the million bonanza."

CHAPTER X.

FOILED.

"GENTS, this man is dead," said Pious Phil, rising from bending over the body of Colorado Carlos, and facing the occupants of Rustling Rube's saloon. "It looks to me as if it war a case ov tooth for tooth."

The crowd looked from the speaker to the figure of the mountain Ishmaelite as it lay across the card-table.

"It ar' evident that one o' the three men got Colorado," continued Phil. "Why they killed 'im I don't know, an' mebbe an inquiry wouldn't demonstrate it ter be any ov our business. We sha'n't investigate this killin'. Thar hev been hundreds like it in Colorado afore this. Ther body kin be taken ter my shanty."

After this, the Trigger Bar pards proceeded to liquor up at Pious Phil's expense, and the body of the big sport was carried out and laid down in the lean alcalde's cabin.

"Thar's our chance," whispered one of three men who watched these proceedings. "We need not have to go to ther trouble to dig a corpse up to search it. When it has been left in the cabin we'll visit it there."

Colorado Carlos soon had the miner's cabin to himself. The four carriers had left the body on Pious Phil's cot, and had gone back to Rustling Rube's.

Two minutes later a man was at the cabin door. It was Ruby Rob.

The cabin front was cast in shadow, and only the keenest eyes could have seen the man from Satanscrown at the door, but the keenest eyes saw him.

A man who had the tread and motions of the trailing wildcat, came down the darkened cabin row with his eyes fastened on the shanty. He was slim, agile, and the possessor of a sharp face.

Pious Phil! says the reader. Yes, it was Pious Phil.

Ruby Rob did not see the man, for he entered the cabin which was dark on the inside and silent. He shut the door carefully behind him, and began to search for the dead.

In a room that was cramped as that one was, it did not take long for the Satanscrown sport to find the body of every man's enemy. When his hand touched it, he gave vent to a low ejaculation of joy.

The next moment his search began.

In the first place he went through Colorado's pockets, but the result did not disappoint him. All at once, and just when he was about to make a minute examination, he was certain that the door had opened.

Ruby Rob stopped and threw a look behind him; if the door had opened it was closed now, and the interior of the cabin was dark enough.

"That door opened. I felt the fresh air on my neck," muttered the boss of Satanscrown, and then he felt and drew without noise the bowie under his coat. "Somebody is with me in this shanty. I would bet a thousand to ten that I am not alone with Colorado Carlos."

The very silence told Ruby Rob that he was not alone. He held his heart still, as it were, and listened for a breath, or any sound that would rivet his convictions, but none came. Once or twice his hand crept back to the body, as if to resume the search so terribly broken off, but each time he stopped as if a hand had dropped from the silence and the gloom upon his shoulder.

This suspense was fast becoming a greater burden than Ruby Rob could bear.

"Thar's no use. I can't search Colorado Carlos under these circumstances," he said to himself at last. "If thar's a man hyer I must know it."

He got up and drew back from the mountain Ishmaelite. His right hand still clutched the bowie, for he did not know how soon he would be attacked, panther-like, by that unseen foe. For five minutes he stood on the defensive amid the gloom, and they were the longest five minutes of his life.

"I'll strike a match," he said to himself, but to his utter astonishment he unconsciously spoke aloud.

"No, I'll do that myself," said a voice.

The speaker stood directly in front of Ruby Rob, and so near that the Satanscrown sport recoiled with a sharp cry.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"Ther match'll show yer," was the answer,

and the next moment the flash of a lucifer parted the darkness.

"I don't know you," said Ruby Rob, who was discovered standing erect with the bowie in his hand, and a wild light in the depths of his eyes.

"I am Pious Phil, boss ov Trigger Bar," was the response, and the lean sport coolly applied the burning match to the wick of a lamp which he took from a shelf and placed on the table.

Captain Rob looked this man over from head to foot. He saw that his shoulders were not broad and that his arms were unusually long, and on that account dangerous, thought the sport.

"You heard me come in, eh, but the darkness hid me?" said Pious Phil, with a smile.

"I knew that the door opened."

"I don't want ter disturb yer. If you kin find anything valuable on Colorado Carlos you kin do more than we did at Rube's. He never war famous for carryin' bonanzas on his anatomy. Did you give him the bullet?"

"No," said Ruby Rob.

"It war a dead'ner whoever gave it to 'im. You hev a light ter work by now; go back an' finish up."

Captain Rob looked at the man and then at the body on the couch. He did not want to finish his quest in the presence of Pious Phil, yet, the last sentence had taken the shape of a command.

"I admit that I was looking at Colorado when you came in," said he, "but I have nothing particular to search him for."

A smile was seen to come to the corners of Pious Phil's lips.

"Do you often visit dead men?" he asked.

"This man war ther cashier, president an' teller ov ther Git-Thar Bank. Did yer think he carried its funds with him, Captain Rob?"

The man from Satanscrown started at the mention of his name.

"Oh, I know pretty much every prominent man in Colorado, an' I don't go from home much either," he went on, amused at the start. "I know that you're Ruby Rob from Satanscrown, an' it ar' my opinion that you've expected ter find something ov value on ther corpse yonder."

"I'm not stranded yet," snapped Ruby Rob, showing his teeth.

"Who said you war?" replied Pious Phil in the same spirit. "You three men have no intention ov goin' ter ther Shasta kentry. Thet lay-out yer gave Gold-dust Jim down at Rube's war all gammon. Now an' then you dropped a word thet gave ther scheme away. Gold-dust ar' no fool if he ar' ther dude ov Trigger Bar. You won't find yer bonanza hyer, Ruby Rob. It took wings some time ago an' flew ter parts unknown."

The man who heard these words could hardly repress an exclamation. Did Pious Phil know that he had come to Trigger Bar to find the heires of the Golden Gate? If not, what did his last words mean?

"Now go back and search Colorado," continued Pious Phil, in whose hand all this time was held a cocked revolver. "You came ter Trigger ter play a game, Ruby Rob, an' I'm helpin' yer through."

"What if I refuse to touch that body again?"

"I may give Colorado a bed-fellow on the mountain," was the cool reply.

Crunching his anger between his teeth, Captain Rob turned to the figure on the miner's cot. Pious Phil took a step forward and stood over him.

"His pockets hev been searched," he said. "Some men carry valuables in the linin' ov their clothes or somewhar in their boots."

"But this man doesn't."

"You don't know till you've searched 'im."

"I'll know where you carry your heart before I'm through with you, Pious Phil," he hissed, and then stooping over the body he began the forced examination.

"Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed. "This man isn't dead!"

A strange cry from Pious Phil's lips greeted the Satanscrown sport.

"Colorado not dead? What ar' yer givin' me?" said the lean tough snatching the lamp from the table and leaning forward. "He war dead enough when we fetched 'im hyer."

"Look at him now! No corpse has 'an eye like that."

Pious Phil held the lamp close to the mountain Ishmaelite's face, and Ruby Rob in the excitement of the moment bent forward to confirm his startling discovery.

"By Jove! life has come back!" exclaimed Pious Phil.

As he spoke he retreated to the table and set the lamp down with a hand that trembled.

"Thet's ther first miracle Trigger ever had," he said. "I'll bet all my dust an' I'm no pauper, thet thet man war dead when he war brought hyer by ther boys. Captain Rob, did ye ever see anything like it?"

The Satanscrown sport shook his head.

They both saw that there was some expression in the eyes where a deathly stare had been seen a moment before, but otherwise Colorado Carlos seemed dead.

"Let me have him now," resumed Pious Phil.

"If he has a chance for life, by glory! he shall keep it."

Impulse, heightened by a flash of the eye drove Ruby Rob forward.

He did not want the spark of life fanned into a substantial flame. Colorado Carlos knew the secret of the portrait, he had read the boot-concealed letter of the Silent Hound, therefore better for Ruby Rob that he were dead. Pious Phil was going to do all in his power to increase the Ishmaelite's chances for life, and if he should succeed the hand of Colorado Carlos would yet play a bold game against the scheme for the bonanza of the Golden State.

It was time for Ruby Rob to act.

"Now or never!" he thought, as he started toward the lean Alcalde of Trigger Bar.

"See here. If you knew why that man was shot, you wouldn't talk about helping him along," he said.

Pious Phil wheeled about in an instant.

"Why war he shot?" he asked.

"For cause," was the reply. "It is a just case of blood for blood. Colorado Carlos in unprovoked murder killed the brother of the man who shot him."

Pious Phil drew back a step.

"Is that solid?" he said, looking Ruby Rob in the eye.

"It is. You believe in the unwritten law of the West, Pious Phil?"

"I always did that."

"This is a case of it."

The next moment there came a sound that startled both men.

"That man lies!" said a human voice.

Instinctively, Ruby Rob and Pious Phil looked at the prostrate sport. The lips to all appearance had not moved, but the eyes had turned and were fastened on the Satanscrown rough.

"He said that, didn't he?" said Pious Phil, looking at Captain Rob.

"If he did, he will never repeat it!" was the flashing response, and the speaker went forward with the ire of a fury.

"Not that way!" and Ruby Rob was halted by the skeleton hand of the lean alcalde. "If that man lives you shall meet him on equal grounds. He ain't yer equal now, an' he sha'n't be killed in my shanty. Give him a chance."

"I'd sooner give the devil one!" cried the Satanscrown sport.

"A chance Colorado Carlos shall hev', be he devil or saint! I am master hyer, as you ar' said ter be in Satanscrown."

The two men were looking into each other's faces; Pious Phil was giving the desperado of the South glance for glance.

"Give him the chance, then," suddenly said Ruby Rob. "Try all your skill on the mountain Ishmaelite, and fetch him through if you can. I sha'n't interfere. I su pose he knows who gave him the bullet he got to-night. If it should have escaped his memory, when he comes to, tell him that it came from Topaz Tom, and that behind the shooter are the banded Jewels of Satanscrown!"

Captain Rob threw another fierce look at Colorado Carlos and stepped back. The eyes of the mountain Ishmaelite were still upon him.

"I'll tell him every word!" said Pious Phil, but Ruby Rob was already gone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN DANGEROUS AGAIN.

It was the third night after the somewhat thrilling events just narrated, when a man dropped from a saddle in Satanscrown and lifted the latch of a cabin that stood before him.

As he stepped inside he was greeted by an exclamation of surprise in a woman's voice, and Nugget Nell confronted him.

"Did you find the trail of the Golden Gate heiress?" asked the woman.

"I found it and lost it," growled the man, who was Ruby Rob. "The girl was at Trigger Bar sure enough."

"Kate Lossing?"

"Yes, the heiress of the Golden Gate."

"But you haven't given up the chase? You didn't come back to tell me this?"

The camp Cleopatra was excited.

"The boys are on the scent. I left them at work—Topaz Tom, Agate Alf, Jasper John and Onyx Oil. I am confident that the girl left Trigger Bar the night we got thar; that she went off with a young miner called Idaho Ivan."

"What! were you so near?" cried Nugget Nell.

"Within reach, almost," said Captain Rob, with a smile. "We met Colorado Carlos at Trigger Bar, and Topaz shot him."

"And you got the picture and the document?"

"No. A man known as Pious Phil played an unexpected game, and prevented. It makes no particular difference, though. What has happened here?"

"A good deal," said Nugget Nell, and her mind went back to the occurrences that were still fresh there. "In the first place, Cuban Con made a forced sale to a man who is more dangerous than Colorado Carlos was."

"Who is he?"

The woman laid her hand on Ruby Rob's

arm, and leaning forward, looked up into his face.

"Colonel Tarantula," she said, in a voice that was full of fear and hate.

Captain Rob started visibly.

"That man? Why he is your—"

"There, don't finish!" interrupted the woman, growing suddenly white. "Yes, that man is here; he came the night you left; he made Cuban Con take a thousand dollars for his ranch; he got the drop on Diamond Dave, and still holds the fort."

For a moment the Satanscrown boss did not speak. Nugget Nell's revelations seemed to have taken his breath.

"What new phase of the game is this?" he said at last and suddenly.

"Heaven knows. When I thought myself free, he turns up. I am confident that he is on the hunt of the Golden Gate heiress. I am also morally certain that he killed the Silent Hound."

"That man?"

"Colonel Tarantula!"

"Where is Diamond Dave?"

"I haven't seen him for a whole day. When Colonel Tarantula first came, Diamond Dave was going to kill him on sight; he went to the saloon with that intention, but the man from Texas has completely cowed him. Diamond Dave, wherever he is to-night, is the veriest coward that walks the earth. He wouldn't face the colonel for his share of the bonanza, cash in his hand."

"There must be something terribly persuasive in this man," said Ruby Rob. "I have never seen him. All I know about him you have told me. What has become of Cuban Con?"

"He left camp last night."

"Frightened off by the Texan?" asked Ruby Rob between his teeth.

"I think so."

"Has he disturbed you since he came?"

"He was here once."

"Well?"

"It was the night you went away."

"He recognized you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"The interview was brief. He went from here to Cuban Con's cabin and bought the saloon."

"Well, that is not enough," said Captain Rob. "I want to know what Colonel Tarantula said to you. Did he make any threats?"

The Colorado Cleopatra hesitated, but the dark eyes of the Satanscrown boss were upon her.

"Tell me the truth," they said.

"He made one threat," she confessed, in tones scarcely audible.

"What was it?"

"He threatened to drag me to San Francisco."

"For what?"

Ruby Rob saw the woman's lips close firmly behind the last sentence.

"Go on, Nell."

"Not for you or any living man!" she cried. "I have a secret which you shall never hear from my lips. I would sooner go to San Francisco than tell it to you."

"You committed some crime there," he said, coldly. "Before I found you, you did it. I never did think you the most innocent woman in the world. I am not deceived. Do you know what I am going to do? I intend to make this Colonel Tarantula tell me what you did there!"

"Anything but that," she cried, suddenly clutching his arm, but he shook her off and stepped back.

"I ought to do it, anyhow," he said in a softer tone. "However, I won't, Nell. You can keep your secret for all I care; but I've given you a good scare."

The woman looked thankful, like a person who is jerked back from the verge of a precipice.

"I am going to show the foreigner that I run this camp," he went on.

"That means Colonel Tarantula," said Nugget Nell taking breath.

"It means him!"

Ruby Rob did not question the woman much longer. He seemed anxious to cross weapons with this man who had installed himself as a citizen of Satanscrown with an effrontery that was astonishing. Nugget Nell put no bar upon his departure, and her first breath of relief was taken when once more she found herself the only tenant of the hut.

Captain Rob went to a cabin which belonged to the man he had left in charge of the camp, and entered without permission.

A lamp which had almost exhausted its oil was burning on the table and near it lay a piece of paper which the sport picked up and read as follows:

"TO CAPTAIN ROB:—I am going away never to come back. I am almost certain that I know where my long-lost brother Gideon is, and it is my duty to go to him. You can get somebody in my place. I solemnly declare that the presence of Colonel Tarantula has nothing to do with my going. I hope the hand you hold will win the stakes; give my substitute my share. Good-by."

"DIAMOND DAVE."

A smile stole over Ruby Rob's face when he reached the end of this letter.

"From what Nugget Nell says about you, Diamond Dave, this letter is a confession of cowardice," he said. "I'll just keep this farewell and some day I may have the pleasure of shooting it into your teeth. It must be a wonderful man who can cow you, for I never saw a cowardly sign in you, Diamond."

He thrust the letter into a pocket, blew out the light, and left the cabin.

Overhead a lot of fleecy clouds were skurrying across the silver disk of the moon, and a light wind that was warm and pleasant came from the west, blowing over the little cemetery on the mountain-side to which the tongueless man had lately been added.

From where Ruby Rob stood he could see the open door of the place until lately kept by Cuban Con, and when he knew that he could find Colonel Tarantula there a fierce light suddenly lit up his eyes.

Before he moved he drew his revolvers and assured himself that the steel chambers were filled. Then he took a step toward the mountain saloon, but stopped and hesitated.

"Is it policy to go there and provoke a quarrel with this man whom I have never met?" he asked himself. "Merely to resent the threat he made to Nugget Nell, no; to show him that if he is hunting the heiress of the Golden Gate he must be careful how he plays his hand, yes!"

Captain Rob went toward the saloon again.

There was something striking about the picture of the long-haired, big-batted sport walking toward the scene of Satanscrown's most memorable affrays. More than one-half of the occupants of the mountain cemetery had been carried from Cuban Con's, ready for the long rest which no pistol-shot disturbs.

A strange curiosity possessed Ruby Rob. He was eager to see the man who had forced Cuban Con to sell out a lucrative business, and who had transformed Diamond Dave into a coward.

He did not halt until he was almost at the threshold of the saloon.

When within six feet of the door he caught sight of a man behind the counter, and as if a thunderbolt had dropped before him he stopped and drew back.

"Can it be?" he exclaimed. "Is that the man called Colonel Tarantula? I told Nugget Nell that I had never seen him, but I know that fellow. A man with only one name in this part of the world is nobody at all. The last time I saw that man was the night he broke the Mexican faro-bank in Taos, and walked off with ten thousand. He wasn't called Colonel Tarantula then. He was Major Mossback, but he's changed his name and advanced to a higher military title. He has forgotten me, of course. I played against him that night and helped to lay the plans that made him a pauper before he got out of town. I didn't expect to meet him here, and with a hand in the game for the million bonanza. Going to send Nell to Frisco, eh? We'll see about that, colonel!"

The next moment Ruby Rob was at the threshold of the trap, and the one following he was inside.

The bar at that moment was deserted, but the little card-tables were filled. Colonel Tarantula had turned his back to the counter and was lighting a cigar.

Captain Rob walked straight to the bar and threw his finger up to enjoin silence on the men who had discovered him, then he leaned forward with a Satanic grin on his countenance and said derisively:

"I'll take whisky cold, colonel."

The strangeness of the voice that spoke these words had an instant effect.

Colonel Tarantula wheeled in the droop of an eyelash and the eyes of the two men met.

The smile was still at Captain Rob's mouth.

"I am Ruby Rob, colonel," he continued.

"And if you have no objection, I'll drink to the success of the new citizen of Satanscrown which is yourself."

"Certainly. Excuse me. I did not know you were Ruby Rob. You were not here when I took possession. Have you a favorite bottle, captain?"

The nonchalance of the man was remarkable. While Ruby Rob's sudden appearance no doubt startled him, he was now not in the least excited.

"He does not know me as one of the players of the Taos game," said Rob to himself. "He would probably jump out of his boots if I should tell him."

Meantime Colonel Tarantula had taken a bottle from one of the shelves, and it and a glass were set before the Satanscrown sport.

As Ruby Rob poured out the liquor he glanced up through his long lashes, and saw the new ranch-owner looking at him through his own.

"Hyer's to you, colonel," exclaimed the sport.

"May yer success ever equal yer beauty—"

"Hold! I have just recognized you," interrupted Colonel Tarantula, and his hand darting across the counter, fell upon Ruby Rob's arm. "I saw you last in Taos. You played ag'in me thar but I don't care for that. We both used

doctored decks that night. I am delighted to meet you ag'in. Shakes!"

It was Ruby Rob's surprise now. He had expected a fight, and not a renewal of friendship.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL TARANTULA IS DESPOILED.

THIS unexpected and ludicrous outcome to his visit to the whisky ranch nettled Captain Rob.

At first he thought of drawing back and declaring open war, but a second thought restrained him.

"It won't do. I'll play with this Texas quantity till I know his cards," he said to himself.

After that his flashing eyes suddenly cooled down and he took the hand which Colonel Tarantula reached across the counter. The occupants of the place looked on astonished, for they, too, had expected a serious collision between the two sports.

"Didn't expect to find me domiciled in Satanscrown?" smiled the colonel. "I'm somewhat of a rolling stone an' precious little moss I pick up on this mundane sphere. Just got back, eh?"

Ruby Rob looked at the speaker.

Did he mean that he had just returned from his hunt for the Golden Gate heiress?

"I have just come in; business took me away several days ago," he said, watching the effect of his words.

"Business! Ah, yes! I know what it is myself," said Colonel Tarantula in a manner that was provoking. "I trust your business was successful," and he looked Captain Rob in the eye as he spoke.

"Tolerably so, colonel, tolerably so," he said, biting his lips behind the answer. "But you will excuse me now. I will see you later on to-night."

Three minutes later Ruby Rob was in his own cabin, and he had hardly shut the door behind him when he was joined by a man who resembled Diamond Dave.

"You caught my signal, Gold-dust Jim?" Good! In the name of heaven, what kind of a man is that in charge of Cuban Con's bar?"

"A puzzle an' a poison," was the reply, and Gold-dust James gave a light chuckle.

"Tell me everything that has happened since I left. I know that Cuban Con was forced to sell out to Colonel Tarantula, that he got the drop on Diamond Dave and cowed him, and that he was accused of killing the mute. But I want the particulars. I've got some time on my hands, and I don't want you to omit anything. Go ahead!"

Thus commanded, Gold-dust James proceeded and talked in his way for nearly an hour. He told Ruby Rob everything, and as he had witnessed all and was a good story-teller in the rough, he was not interrupted once.

"That's one thing that nobody knows but me, cap'n," said James, at the ending of his story proper.

"Well?"

"Colonel Tarantula went to the cemetery last night an' searched the tongueless man."

Ruby Rob started and uttered an oath.

"I saw the whole proceedin'. He dug the corpse up, took it from the blanket it was wrapped in, an' went through it as if he expected ter find suthin' in the clothes."

"But he found nothing?"

"I ain't so sartain about that."

"What did he find and where?"

"He took his knife an' cut a corner off o' the dummy's coat. Thar may hev been suthin' sewed up thar. I won't say thar' war, mind yer, but I remark that thar might hev been."

"After he did that, what?"

"He put the corpse back into the grave an' covered it up."

Ruby Rob was silent for a moment. It was evident that this revelation was a startler.

"Thar is no doubt of it now. That man is on the trail!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"On what trail, cap'n?"

"No difference. You don't know what he did with the piece of coat he cut away?"

"He put it in his pocket an' went off—that is, he seemed to do that from whar I was watchin'."

"When does he shut up?"

"When the boys get tired."

"Gold dust, they must get tired early to-night," said Captain Rob. "See here; Diamond Dave has deserted, which leaves a vacancy in the banded pards of Satanscrown. I nominate and elect you to that position."

The eyes of Gold-dust James were seen to leap for joy.

One of the pet ambitions of his life was about to be realized. He had long been anxious to become a member of the band that ran and ruled Satanscrown. He believed he had evidence that there was somewhere a bonanza in which they would share alike some day, and Ruby Rob's eagerness over the piece of cloth cut by Colonel Tarantula from the coat of the dead was enough to confirm his belief.

"Captain, I've never been a candidate for the place, but if I kin be ov any sarvice to you in ther ranks, I'm yer man."

"You will consider yourself one of the Six Jewels of Satanscrown," continued Ruby Rob, giving Gold-dust James his bronzed hand in

token of pardship. "I will exact no oath to-night. That will be postponed till the boys come back. You and I will play a game of our own, James."

"Name ther play," said the new recruit. "I'm not much on braggin', cap'n, but when it comes down ter cool business you'll find Gold-dust James always on deck."

Captain Rob got up, went to the door and looked out.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Colonel Tarantula is closed," and he came back to the Satanscrown tough with delight on his countenance.

"I want what the colonel cut from the dead man," he went on, resuming his seat at the rough table. "Gold-dust James, thar ar' no secrets among the Jewels. We are on the hunt of the biggest bonanza that ever existed. It doesn't have to be mined when found. It is already stamped coin."

"Jehosaphat! that hits this pilgrim below the belt," exclaimed the listener. "Do you think that this Texas cool-blade knows aught about the bonanza?"

"He knows."

"Then he shall leave the game!" cried Gold-dust James, and his hand fell with emphasis upon the table. "Just before Cuban Con left camp he came to me an' said: 'You want ter watch that man. He's hyer with a game ov some kind,' an' I've had an eye on 'im ever since. Con war no fool, cap'n."

"Neither was Diamond Dave a coward till this new coyote showed his teeth in camp," replied Ruby Rob with a smile. "But let me go on. Colonel Tarantula has shut up for the night. What shanty does he occupy?"

"He's took possession of Cuban Con's."

"All right. Are you ready to follow me?"

"Try me! You forget already, Cap'n Rob, that I am one ov the Jewels. What's ter be done?"

"We want that man," said the camp boss between his teeth.

"The cemetery 'find' is, of course, on his person. If he is in his shanty now we go straight to it."

"We'll find him thar."

At that moment the man from Texas was in the little cabin which had belonged to Cuban Con. He had gone straight from the saloon to the structure, and he sat at a table on which he had laid a revolver. He had divested himself of his coat, for the night was warm and the cabin door stood slightly ajar.

"The boss of the hunt has come back," he said to himself. "I did not know that Ruby Rob was the man who helped to rob me after I broke the Mexican bank in Taos. When I recognized him as that man, I could hardly keep my finger from the trigger, but I must play coolly the hand I hold now. I am on the right trail. The man who died in Satanscrown the other night was hunting Major Lossing's daughter; and I know now that he was on the scent. If I had found on him what Ruby Rob must have found, I might not be here now. I knew he would come back. He and his men will do anything for the gold bonanza. The woman cannot harm me, although she is a viper of vipers. I hold her down by the threat to drag her to Frisco. She fell in a swoon at Diamond Dave's feet when he told her that she was wanted at the ranch to swear that I killed the Silent Hound of California. She dared not face me, not even with the truth. I don't take anybody into my games. I play them alone, and there is never a divide."

He seemed to laugh to himself at the conclusion of his last sentence, and his sparkling eyes wandered beyond the door where the moonlight lay.

All at once a slight noise fell upon his ear, and he started up.

"Colonel, are you thar?" asked a voice at the door.

Colonel Tarantula was at the threshold in a moment, and found himself looking into the face of Captain Rob.

Beyond the burly figure of the Satanscrown boss he caught a glimpse of another man, but before he could make him out, he was compelled to look into the suddenly leveled pistol of Captain Rob.

"Colonel, we've got ter play a little game for self-protection," said Ruby Rob, from behind the weapon which looked as "ugly" as his eyes. "The man behind me is Gold-dust James. We want you, colonel."

Colonel Tarantula answered not, he made no sign of resistance, and his hands kept at his sides as if the sudden action of Ruby Rob had glued them there.

With a firm step he came from the cabin and looked into the faces of the pair.

"I am here," he said. "What is your pleasure, gentlemen?"

"You will move forward, colonel. Remember the touching of a revolver will be fatal to you," responded Ruby Rob. "This is Satanscrown, the worst place in Colorado, and I am its alcalde."

"I think I've seen worse places than this, but we'll not argue that point here," said Tarantula as he moved away covered by the revolvers of Ruby Rob and Gold-dust James.

No word was spoken until the last cabin was

behind the Texan and his captors and all were on the road that entered Satanscrown from the west.

"Halt!"

All three stopped at this word from Captain Rob's lips, and Colonel Tarantula looked at his enemies.

He had been halted in the moonlight and he saw above him the sides of the mountains and the dark net-work of trees.

"Colonel, in the first place we want what you took from the Silent Hound's corpse last night," said Captain Rob sternly.

The sudden demand made Tarantula give a slight start, which made it evident that he had not expected this.

"Maybe you want more than I've got," he said eying Ruby Rob.

"The man at my right is the living proof that you robbed the dead. He saw the whole performance; you cut a corner from the Silent Hound's coat; there was something sewed up in it. We want that something, colonel. It is on your person now."

"Does the spy know this, too?" asked Colonel Tarantula, giving Gold-dust James a withering look.

"I know it and that is enough!" grated Captain Rob. "I may have to inform you, colonel, that the bluff games that win in Texas don't work in Colorado. You are looking into two revolvers that will launch death into your face if you refuse to surrender the find. When I first saw you in Satanscrown I could have guessed your mission. Shell out, colonel!"

The little figure of the Texan sport appeared to shoot up another inch in stature.

"By Jupiter! I don't like the idea of being robbed," he said.

"And the thought of being killed is equally distasteful, I presume," was the reply.

"Neither one is pleasant," smiled the colonel, and then his left hand moved as if reluctantly to his bosom.

"I did visit the dead man," he went on, "and I did carry away a corner of his coat."

"It contained something!" exclaimed Ruby Rob in his eagerness.

"You are right. It contained a paper which does not interest me now for it was written in cipher and I never was good at such things. There is a person in Satanscrown who has a peculiar faculty for solving such mysteries. You call her Nugget Nell, captain. I don't believe there is a cipher written which that woman cannot make out. As I am to be bulletted if I don't produce the paper I took from the dead, here it is, captain, sewed up pretty much as I found it."

Colonel Tarantula extended his hand toward Ruby Rob, and the next moment the loss of Satanscrown held the coveted prize.

He could hardly suppress a cry of exultation. He knew that the Texan had not misjudged Nugget Nell's ability to decipher secret writing; already the mystery was as good as solved!

"Colonel, you will not object if we command you to face-about and keep your back to Satanscrown from now on," the big sport said. "We don't want you here. The thousand dollars paid by you to Cuban Con for the ranch you can set down in the loss side of the ledger of life. You re-enter Satanscrown at your peril! You fetched no baggage to camp; you will take none out. That is all, colonel. In the best of humor, we bid you good-night."

The two men who expected to see eyes flash and to hear an outburst of rage were disappointed. The face of the Texan did not change color; there were no looks of madness.

"I'm one of those people who take things without grumbling," said the colonel. "The game's ag'in' me now; it may turn in my favor at another time, and somewhere else. I've been dropped so often that I've got kinder used to it. It war my last available thousand; may be I'll never have another. I don't care much. Good-night it is, captain. You won't object if the game turns by an' hy?"

"Certainly not," said Ruby Rob.

Slowly Colonel Tarantula turned away and walked from the sport. The two ruffians saw him go up the road through the moonshine, and gradually lost sight of him.

"His coolness grounds me. I never saw anything like it," said Captain Rob. "Remember! he is to be killed on sight if he ever shows up in Satanscrown. Come! we have won the game we were playing."

The two men went back into the camp and Ruby Rob burst into the cabin occupied by Nugget Nell.

"I've got something for you," he exclaimed cutting open the piece of cloth he held. "Here is a cipher mystery for you to read."

He threw a piece of paper on the table; the woman picked it up.

"This is no mystery," she cried. "It simply reads: 'The fools are not all dead yet.'"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN PIOUS PHIL'S CABIN.

MEANTIME, miles away from Satanscrown a large man was "getting back to life," as he called it.

The reader will recollect that we left Colorado

Carlos in Pious Phil's care, and that the thin alcalde of Trigger Bar had announced his determination of bringing the wounded man through if he possibly could.

The wound made by Topaz Tom's bullet was an ugly one, and at first gave the amateur surgeon and nurse but little hope, but as the hours wore away and Colorado Carlos seemed to be fighting the battle with increasing strength, the whole camp took hope.

It was the night after the shot when the mountain Ishmaelite said to Pious Phil with a curious look.

"I've caught you wondering why Topaz Tom shot me. He only obeyed orders."

Colorado Carlos smiled, but the next second his eyes took on a wild gleam, and his hands shut suddenly as if they clutched the hilt of a bowie.

"Ruby Rob said it was an old feud—that you had killed Topaz Tom's brother," said Pious Phil.

"The galoot never had a brother," was the quick response. "I will tell you. Men call me Colorado Carlos and I have almost come to believe that that is my name; they also call me the mountain Ishmaelite because they think I am every man's enemy. I have wandered through almost every gold-camp in Colorado, but always for a certain purpose. Men have laughed at the drafts I have drawn on Git-Thar Bank; some have thrown them aside, a few have kept them. The day is coming when every one of them will be honored; they will be worth a premium wherever they are found, whether among the gold hills or on the streets of Frisco. You haven't got any, Pious Phil?"

"Nary a draft."

"I'll draw you up several good ones for this sterling service. The game that Ruby Rob and his pards ar' playing is this: There is a fortune in Frisco that belongs to a certain heir who is a young woman now. She has been lost more than eight years. Her father was a retired major of the United States Army when he left Frisco over land for St. Louis with his daughter Kate and three men who turned out to be the worst devils that ever concocted a plot. That is the last Major Lossing's friends ever heard of him, and there is the best of evidence that he was murdered by the guides, and that the child was carried off. I am hunting that girl, known everywhere as the heiress of the Golden Gate. Men have thought that I had nothing in view beyond a desire to frequent the mountain camps. Major Lossing was my friend. He wanted to make me executor of the will he left behind, but I would not consent. I told him, though, that if anything happened, if danger befell him, I would not fail to show my hand."

"There was another man who made the major the same promise. This person is dead now. I arrived in Satanscrown the morning after he was killed. He was Major Lossing's brother-in-law, and was called Donald Dashwood; but from an event that happened after Lossing's murder, he became the Silent Hound of California. He was a keen hunter, and a man who seemed to know exactly where to pick up the lost threads of mystery. It was not long after the major's death that Dashwood thought he had found the three men who had accompanied the travelers from San Francisco. He came to me with the information, and I promised to help him in the arrests he intended to make. That night I waited for Dashwood at an appointed place, but he did not come. The next day he was found in an uninhabited house in the worst quarter of the city, almost dead, and mutilated in the most horrible manner."

"He found the men he wanted when he was not prepared to effect their arrest. For weeks and months Dashwood hovered between life and death, and when he at last came out of the shadow, he became the Silent Hound of California. The villains had deprived him of his tongue!"

Pious Phil uttered a cry as Colorado Carlos paused.

"I have heard of this man," he said.

"After his recovery he went to work again," continued Carlos, "and so did I. He hunted the Shasta camps and then scoured Idaho. We believed that Kate Lossing was still alive, although nobody had brought her forward to claim the enormous estate left by her father. When I came to Satanscrown a few days ago I had not seen Donald Dashwood for many months. I did not know I was near him. What was my horror when I found his dead body lying on the floor of Cuban Con's saloon an object of mystery for the crowd which had just discovered that he was tongueless? There was a mystery about his death which nobody in Satanscrown could solve. He was shot dead by some unknown person shortly after midnight, and there were evidences that the body had been searched by the person who had fired the shot."

"I do not know whether Ruby Rob and his pards thought then that I knew more about the Silent Hound than I would tell, but the boss of Satanscrown found out that I knew something when I forced him to surrender certain documents which he had taken from under the soles of Dashwood's boots. For that, and be-

cause I said by my actions that I knew about Kate Lossing, I was shot on sight by Topaz Tom. Now let me show you something, Pious Phil."

Colorado Carlos put his hand under the pillow of his couch and drew forth a boot.

"Knock the heel off," he said, to Pious Phil.

The lean Alcalde of Trigger Bar obeyed with wonder in his eyes, and a small packet dropped upon the table.

"Before I disclose this I want to ask you if you ever saw anybody who had the deuce of diamonds tattooed into their skin," asked Carlos, holding the packet before the eager miner.

Pious Phil started at the question.

"I should say I hev," he exclaimed.

"That tattoo was on the breast of Donald Dashwood," the mountain Ishmaelite went on. "The bullet that took his life struck between the spots. It was a favorite tattoo in his father's family, and he persuaded Major Lossing to have it traced on his daughter's shoulder when she was several years old."

Pious Phil was agitated; he could not sit still on the stool he occupied; he seemed on the eve of speaking several times, but with an effort forced back his words.

Meanwhile, Colorado Carlos was slowly opening the package found in the boot-heel which had been hollowed to receive it, and the eyes of the lean sport were eagerly watching him.

"This is the picture of Kate Lossing as she appeared at the beginning of the fatal trip," he said, placing a small daguerreotype on the table before Pious Phil.

The Trigger Bar sport looked a moment, and then sprung to his feet with a wild exclamation.

"That is Mountain Moss!" he cried, staring first at the portrait and then at Colorado Carlos, who was looking at him with a quiet smile.

"Who is Mountain Moss?" he asked.

"Idaho Ivan's pard."

"And Idaho Ivan—who is he?"

Pious Phil came back to the table before he spoke again.

"If they hadn't left camp I'd answer by producing 'em," he said.

"They are gone then? Ah! I know it. I met them going out as I came in. The person who called himself Idaho Ivan said they were going to Lode Star Mine."

"It was Idaho's trick," laughed Pious Phil.

"His pard was Mountain Moss."

"He told me that, and I accused the pard of being a girl, but it was in the moonlight and I could not see any resemblance between her and this picture taken years ago."

"You would hev seen it if it had been daylight," said Phil. "I sent 'em away on my hosses, an' all because Ruby Rob and pards had come. When Ivan saw them he seemed to think that they war after Moss."

"Whither have they gone?"

"Ivan would not tell me, but the hint he dropped just afore he said good-by, leads me to believe that they will see Tartarus Gulch."

The name almost drove the mountain Ishmaelite bolt upright.

"Heavens! not there!" he exclaimed. "I warned them to shun that camp!"

"Why not?"

"That camp was one of the three to be searched by the Silent Hound for Kate!" cried Colorado Carlos.

"Ruby Rob, Topaz Tom, and Agate Alf came here; Jasper John and Onyx Oil went to Tartarus Gulch."

"Jerusalem!"

The exclamation seemed to take the dark color from Pious Phil's face.

"Mountain Moss must not fall into their hands," continued the Ishmaelite.

"The boy is brave."

"But not too cunning for the men who are working for a bonanza worth millions," was the reply. "He may be a young lion, but Jasper John and Onyx Oil are tigers in their prime. I would give my life almost, if Topaz Tom's bullet had not found me. How far is it to Tartarus Gulch?"

"Fifty miles."

"You know the way?"

"Every foot of it."

"Then you know what must be done."

"Pious Phil is the man to do it."

Colorado Carlos threw his hand toward the lean alcalde, and it was instantly grasped.

"I must rely on you," he said, eying Pious Phil sharply. "I am compelled to, you see, because I am here."

"I'll make things hum. I used to be a hummer from Hummer's Hive, an' I've lost none o' my vim. Mountain Moss the heiress of the Golden Gate, eh? I always told Idaho Ivan thar war suthin' in thet girl. We picked 'er up in a curious way."

"I don't want the story now," said Colorado Carlos. "I can wait till you come back to report. That girl must not fall into the hands of the two men sent to search Tartarus Gulch for her. Her capture by them means the success of Ruby Rob's big gold game."

"I am off!"

Pious Phil was at the door of his cabin and outside in a moment.

"I believe I can trust that man," murmured

Colorado Carlos. "By my life, I had to! I have found the Golden Gate heiress. If Pious Phil serves me a trick, or if she falls into the hands of the Satanscrown ruffians, I will show somebody the mountain Ishmaelite's teeth. I have to lie here and wait. When we come together, Topaz Tom, there will be a settlement that will not have to be made twice."

The sport fell back and lay perfectly still with closed eyes, and while he did this a man saddled a horse, sprung into the saddle, and went out of Trigger Bar like an arrow.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CIPHER MESSAGE.

If there was in Colorado a more astonished man than Ruby Rob, he would be hard to find.

He felt confident that he had despoiled Colonel Tarantula of a highly important document, but instead of the "cipher" which he expected Nugget Nell to read in a little while, there was but one line, which read:

"The fools are not all dead yet!"

Captain Rob sprung toward the camp Cleopatra, and snatched the paper from her hand.

"Did the galoot play me a trick of this kind?" he exclaimed. "Is this sentence in his own handwriting? Let me see!"

He leaned toward the light and looked at the brief document. The woman's eyes watched him glitteringly.

"Hang me if I haven't been completely hoodwinked by that cool blade!" he grated. "It cannot be that the Silent Hound wrote this and sewed it up in his coat to fool some one."

"No, that is Colonel Tarantula's handwriting," said Nell.

"You ought to know," replied Ruby Rob, whirling suddenly upon her. "You've seen a good deal of his writing in your time."

"To my sorrow," was the answer. "There is no bottom to that man's shrewdness. He evidently expected to be robbed, and wrote that message for that purpose. The paper taken from the Silent Hound, if he really took one, he still keeps."

Ruby Rob tore the paper across and threw the pieces away with a mad oath.

"You don't care, I suppose, if I follow this man and get the true document?" he said, leaning toward Nugget Nell.

"I! Why should I care?"

"Pardon me! I knew you wouldn't," he laughed. "He threatened to send you to Frisco, ha, ha! He'll never do that, my mountain finch. He isn't two miles from Satanscrown, and he knows that he cannot retake possession of his saloon. Colonel Tarantula is hunting the Golden Gate heiress. I would like to know how he came to know that there was something important sewed up in the corner of the Silent Hound's coat. One of these days, and before long, I will find out!"

"It is a mystery that puzzles me. Before we parted he never said a word about the heiress, although he used to remark that there was a certain big bonanza somewhere if the proper person could strike the trail. At that time I did not think about the Golden Gate heiress."

"I did," said Ruby Rob, with a sniff.

"When the boys come in we'll hear a good report."

"I hope so. But are you going to follow the colonel?"

Before the boss of Satanscrown could reply the door opened and a voice said "Captain" in tones that took him forward.

The person outside was Gold-dust James.

"I have found a paper in the colonel's shanty," said the Satanscrown tough, producing a little packet which he held up before Ruby Rob's eyes. "It is covered over with strange marks, an'—"

"Jerusalem!" interrupted the camp boss, as he snatched it from the man's grip. "The paper we took from Colonel Tarantula was an infamous cheat. This is the right one. He lost it in the cabin, Gold-dust."

There was triumph in the eyes that came back to Nugget Nell, and the new find was thrown upon the paper before her.

"This is the document I want read," he said. "Thar is nothing about living fools on it. Ah! see the cipher, Nell! I heard you boast once that the most secret writing could not baffle you long."

"I am willing to prove that boast," said the woman. "I see that this is a secret paper of some kind. Leave me alone for a while."

"Can't you work it out with somebody by?"

"I prefer to be alone," was the reply.

"When shall I come back?"

"Say, at the end of two hours."

Ruby Rob bit his lip and looked displeased, but did not offer any audible objection. Two hours! The period, although brief, would seem an age to him; but when he reflected that cipher writing was a puzzle to the shrewdest, he went away without a murmur and left Nugget Nell to herself.

A strange pallor came over the face of the woman thus left alone. She picked up the paper, looked at it a moment and then went

to the door, which she secured against intrusion by means of an iron bolt. Then she came back to the little table and went to work.

"What fortune is this that brings me face to face with a cipher which I have seen before?" she suddenly exclaimed, after a few minutes' work. "Is this cipher connected with the identity of the heiress of the Golden Gate? And is it really the one taken by Colonel Tarantula from the corpse of the Silent Hound?"

For some time longer Nugget Nell worked on the cipher, and on a piece of paper under her right hand she wrote word after word until the work grew into intelligible sentences.

It was evident that her excitement was increasing as she toiled. Not once did she look up; the door was barred, and nobody could intrude.

If she had looked up she might have seen a face at the little window beside the door. It was a smooth face, with the most piercing eyes, and these were riveted upon her while she worked away at the cipher.

All at once Nugget Nell sprang up with a cry that seemed wrung from her heart.

"This is the work of a veritable fiend!" she cried, staring at the cipher document, which looked innocent enough in the lamplight. "When am I to be free from that man?—free from that merciless threat of his? I will go back to my work. I will write out the whole paper, but I will destroy the translation. Ruby Rob shall be met with a deliberate falsehood when he comes back. He shall be told that for once a cipher has failed me. My very life depends on a lie of this kind!"

She went back to the table with the glittering eyes at the window, but her face now had no color and her hands shook as she wrote.

"I wouldn't show him this for the world," she exclaimed at last. "This paper was intended for me. He knew that I could master this cipher. Oh, the infamous monster!"

She clutched her translation, and was about to tear it up when a light noise startled her.

In a second she whirled toward the door.

All at once she saw the eyes at the window. The face was laughing now.

"You back here!" she cried, springing toward the window; but suddenly she drew back and stared at the face like a person frightened to the bounds of reason.

There was no reply.

"If you will come in I will fight you with revolver or knife!" she went on. "You wrote this cipher message for me. You knew that it would be brought to me for translation. I hate you now as I loved you once! Come in if you dare!"

There was yet no reply; the face at the window was certainly Colonel Tarantula's, the eyes also were his.

All at once the apparition vanished, and Nugget Nell reeled toward the table as if the sudden disappearance had unnerved her.

The translation of the cipher was clutched in her hand. She sunk upon the little couch with a wail of despair.

"Why let him play this game of threat and mystery over me?" she said. "He certainly knows the secret I have tried to keep. He is liable to whisper it in Ruby Rob's ears. What does he say in the message?—'I am tempted to make your last conquest a tiger who will take your blood.' What does that mean? That he is ready to tell the secret to Captain Rob! My God! I am expected to read my translation of the message to Ruby Rob when he comes! I would not do this for a solid globe of gold! I am going away."

She went to the window and looked out. The moon hung like a rounded shield in the heavens, and here and there the ground looked like a rough silver pavement. She saw nobody. The face that had frightened her with its diabolic grin had disappeared. The gold-camp seemed asleep, although it was not very late.

"They can finish this hunt for the Golden Gate heiress alone," she said when she came back to the table. "I have longed to share in the spoil, but I will never touch a dollar of it now. This man stands between me and my ambition. If he were dead, and I'd want to see him buried before I would call him that, I could stay here and help Ruby Rob play his game out; but with Colonel Tarantula alive and in possession of my one secret, I cannot stay. It drives me from Satanscrown, it makes a fugitive out of me, and I can never turn my face toward San Francisco!"

She took her translation of the cipher message and held it over the flame of the lamp until it fell charred and worthless from her hand. The cipher itself still lay on the table, and it seemed as if she dared not touch that. It was Ruby Rob's property and she knew him too well to lay a destroying hand upon it.

"He can never decipher it," she said. "I believe there are but two living persons equal to the task, Colonel Tarantula and myself."

Five minutes later Nugget Nell opened the cabin door and went out. There was determination in her eyes; she had resolved on something desperate.

She kept in the shade of the cabins and walked stealthily toward the eastern end of the straggling camp. Her footsteps sent forth no sound.

She did not want to be seen by Ruby Rob, or Gold-dust James.

Fortune seemed to favor the camp Cleopatra for she reached a certain long cabin somewhat lower than the others and with the looks of a stable.

"I will take Blackwings. He gave the horse to me a year ago and I will only be taking my own," she murmured. "The horse is the best in Satanscrown, and by morning I will have many miles between me and this camp."

Nugget Nell opened the door of the long building and went fearlessly in. The interior was dark, but she knew where to go, for she found a horse that greeted her with a low neigh of recognition. It took but a little while for her to saddle the animal, and then she led him out and down the road which soon lost itself, as it were, among the mountains.

Glancing back once she saw an open door and a bright light beyond. It was Cuban Con's place.

"I told Captain Rob that I wanted two hours on the cipher and he acquiesced," she said to herself. "An hour still remains, and I shall be far away at the end of that time."

A short distance beyond the lost cabin Nugget Nell stopped the horse and mounted.

The road there was yielding, grassy in some places and dusty in others. It was soft enough to prevent the hoofs of a horse from sending forth any sound, and the beautiful fugitive from Satanscrown rode noiselessly away.

"I will give the camp a new sensation," she laughed. "There will be no one to call the roll of the Jewels hereafter. Captain Rob will wonder what took me off. I wouldn't have him know for all the gold at stake in the game he plays. Colonel Tarantula, imp and fiend, would to heaven you had never crossed my path! Should we meet again my arm will prove strong enough to remove from earth forever the sharer of my secret."

The Cleopatra of Satanscrown went over the road at a smart gallop. She heard no follower at her horse's heels, she looked back and saw that every semblance of a gold-camp had vanished.

She was alone among the mountains; she was a fugitive after a long life among the roughs of Colorado; she had turned her back upon the man who had fetched her to Satanscrown, the man whom she actually loved with a tiger's passion. A week previous she would have laughed at the thought of deserting Ruby Rob.

A mile was between her and Satanscrown; the road was narrow and there were high walls on either hand. Here and there the shadows of rocks and trees fell across the trail ghostlike and fearful, but the well-trained horse did not shy.

All at once something touched the woman. The animal seemed to have been touched at the same time, for he turned his head.

Nugget Nell looked to the left and saw a man riding at her side!

It was apparent that this person had just come up, and that the narrowness of the trail at that spot had caused him to touch her.

The discovery sent a chill to the woman's heart; she recoiled from the man, and her hand went toward the revolver with which she had provided herself; but at that moment the uninvited companion leaned forward and his fingers closed on her arm.

"You read the message, and are going away, eh?" he laughed, showing her a pair of glittering eyes. "Why don't you ride toward Frisco, my California Borgia?"

Nugget Nell uttered a cry and tried to break from his grasp.

"For Heaven's sake, let me go on!" wailed from her heart.

"Let you go? Not yet! I want you in Satanscrown for a while yet. Come! you will go back with me."

"With you?"

"With the man whose blood you could drink—with Colonel Tarantula!"

And Nugget Nell, almost in a swoon, saw her horse's head turned toward Satanscrown.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE EAGLE'S TALONS.

THREE persons on a wild road, but not near Satanscrown.

Two are men past thirty-five, rough-looking fellows, with big hats and dark faces, with long mustaches and with spurs on their boots; the other is young and handsome, with soft eyes under a grayish hat, and hair like threads of silk.

The big men watch this third person as the eagle watches the dove in its power. Their eyes glitter with victory and every now and then they exchange glances that can have but one meaning.

"You don't like to talk, eh?" suddenly laughs one of the men addressing the person between them.

"Why should I? I have said all that I can say. I have pleaded with you, but you will not listen."

"It's ag'in' orders; we war sent ter do a sartin thing an' we hev done it, eh, Onyx Oil?"

"Yes," nods the desperado on the youth's

left. "We expected ter run across you at Tartarus Gulch, but we happened ter find you on this side."

"What does it all mean? Won't you give me an inkling of it?"

"That's ag'in' orders, too, but you'll know soon enough."

"Was it necessary to shoot my companion?" And the eyes of the speaker suddenly flash. "Was that the command, too? You did not give him a chance to tell you who we were. You came upon us suddenly; you lay in ambush for us like road-agents, and with the command to throw up our hands, one of you fired and my friend, Idaho Ivan, dropped from his saddle. We were on our way to Tartarus Gulch; perhaps we did not intend to stop there, but this has nothing to do with this case. Almost before my friend touched the ground, I was your prisoner. You seemed to be on the lookout for me. I am Mountain Moss and a young girl, but for all this there may come a day of retribution for the shot that killed Idaho Ivan."

"We'll risk that, my mountain beauty," laughed Jasper John. "Ef it warn't ag'in' orders, we'd answer all yer questions, but, as it is, we can't. Ef you'll hev a little patience you'll know every thing soon enough."

"Am I going back to Trigger Bar?"

"Not just now."

Mountain Moss who was the person between the two ruffians made no reply.

She had been found by a part of the gold-gang, and the flight from Trigger Bar with the young miner Idaho Ivan had terminated disastrously.

Now she was going, she knew not where, only it was certain that the two roughs did not intend to escort her back to the Bar where she had a friend and a champion in the person of Pious Phil.

She knew, too, that the two men were not traveling the same road by which she had left mountain camp. The path traveled seemed little better than a trail; it was not straight, but wound in and out like a serpent. Mountain Moss was on a trail entirely new to her, which was not strange, since she had never seen the place called Tartarus Gulch.

What had become of the three men whose sudden appearance at Trigger Bar had caused Idaho Ivan to conduct her from it? Had they left and were her captors two of them? She did not think that Onyx Oil and Jasper John were another branch of the gang that had hunted for years for a clew to a mystery worth more than a million dollars.

The two sports took delight in watching their captive. They could have told her that they were conducting her to Ruby Rob at Satanscrown, that she was in all probability the famous heiress of Golden Gate, and that she was worth more to them than the biggest gold-mine in the rich Northwest.

But as Onyx Oil had several times repeated, it was "ag'in' orders," and the mystified girl saw that she was only wasting words on the two men into whose net she had fallen.

And so she rode along between the two sports, wondering what was to be the outcome of her capture, and sighing audibly at times when she thought of the heartless shot that had tumbled Idaho Ivan headlong from his saddle.

Suddenly there rung out the sharp report of a rifle, and the robust figure of Jasper John rose suddenly in his stirrups, and with a wild cry pitched forward over his horse's ears!

Mountain Moss raised her head at the shot, and her eyes suddenly kindled with hope. Onyx Oil darted at her, and his bronze hand closed on her arm as with the disengaged fingers he drew and cocked a heavy revolver.

"Try that ag'in an' I kill the person by me!" he shouted to the person whose shot had tumbled Jasper John. "I hold my revolver at that person's head, an' my finger is at the lightest trigger in Colorado!"

Mountain Moss looked into the speaker's face. He was leaning toward her almost out of the saddle, and his hand was pressing the revolver against her head. There was "shoot" in the desperado's eyes and death in the words he sent toward the person who had fired the shot. The two horses were walking slowly over the trail at that moment lying in moonlight; behind them stood Jasper John's horse with his nostrils against the stalwart figure lying across the trail with a splash of crimson on the gray shirt-front.

The second shot did not come, which told Mountain Moss that the slayer saw her peril and would not shoot.

"Don't lift your hand! utter no cry," admonished Onyx Oil. "The person who fired that shot killed the wrong man. You are going to the captain either dead or alive. This is a game for big money, girl, and we are prepared to play any hand for it."

The horses kept on, and the revolver never left the girl's temple.

"That bullet came from above," Onyx Oil suddenly went on. "There is a trail above us, an' the person intended to follow it up, with a second one, but I was too quick for him. Did you recognize the crack of that rifle?"

"I did not," said the girl.

"Neither did I; but no difference," was the reply. "The shootist, whoever he is, knows that another shot, even if it pierced my heart, would be the death of you, and I am going to beat him."

A little further on the trail lay in shadow, and the moment the horses struck it the revolver dropped from the girl's hand.

Then Onyx Oll leaned toward the horse's bit and grasped the rein.

"We ar' goin' ter make time," he chuckled. "The man up the mountain may follow ef he wants ter, but it might prove dangerous business."

A moment later the two horses were going rapidly over the trail side by side. There was wild triumph in the eyes of Onyx Oll, but now and then they would flash savagely, as if he thought of the comrade lying behind him dead, where he had struck the trail.

"Halt!"

Onyx Oll started up as the horses stopped.

"Oll, by Jupiter!"

"Topaz Tom!"

The next moment Mountain Moss was looking into two more strange faces, and the men were eying her with mingled curiosity and triumph.

"Is this the bird?" asked Topaz Tom as he leaned toward the girl.

"It is nobody else, Topaz. Whar's ther cap'n?"

"Gone back."

"Ter camp?"

"Yes."

Mountain Moss looked closely at Topaz Tom and his companion, and turned upon the latter.

"I have seen you before," she said.

"I guess not."

The man avoided her gaze, but she was not to be daunted.

"You dare not look me in the face," she said.

"Look her in the eye, Agate," laughed Topaz Tom. "The bird may think she has seen you afore, but it's all gammon. Give her the eye."

Agate Alf turned toward the girl and for several moments she scrutinized him closely, much to his displeasure.

"What is your name?" she suddenly asked.

"Agate Alf," said the ruffian, tartly.

"It was not always that," she said. "I have seen you before, but when?—where? There is a portion of my life that seems to be blotted from memory—nearly two years, at least. But I have seen you somewhere; it was when I was a little child, but I cannot fix date or place."

"Maybe you've seen me, too!" laughed Topaz Tom. "I've been pretty nigh everywhar. Photograph me on yer mind, my girl. I'm no beauty, but what thar is of me, ar' almighty solid."

Agate Alf seemed relieved when Mountain Moss turned her eyes upon Topaz Tom.

"Ov course she's seen me afore," muttered the sport just scrutinized. "I b'lieve I would hev knowed her anywhar. I kin go afore any 'quire an' swear that that is Major Lossing's child. She's changed a good deal since then, but thar is the Lossing eye an' ther major's voice. We've made no mistake; we've found ther heiress ov ther Golden Gate!"

"Don't know me, eh?" said Topaz Tom to the girl, who was eying him steadily.

Mountain Moss slowly shook her head.

"But you've seen Agate somewhar? That's kinder curious."

"I have seen him," and the girl's gaze returned to Agate Alf, who became restless under it. "It was years ago. I have told you about the loss of a part of my life. I can't imagine what I am wanted for. Ain't you men from Satanscrown?"

"But you've seen Agate somewhar? That's kinder curious."

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"He'll tell you, my girl," was the reply. "Satanscrown isn't far away, an' ther captain is thar."

"I will wait."

From that time on Mountain Moss had three guards. Agate Alf rode ahead with a Winchester lying cocked across the saddle, and the girl sat between the other two who talked not, but watched her as if she was heir to the universe.

"This is what I call a big play," said Topaz Tom, to himself. "It's like raking in a jackpot with a pair o' deuces. This is the girl who is worth millions; this is the creature who has been lost for eight years. We hev her now; thar is no Colorado Carlos ter interfere, for I shot him on sight at Trigger Bar and ther Silent Hound ov Californy got his quietus by some unknown hand afore we left Satanscrown. We hev only ter take possession ov ther bonanza with this girl for ther proof, an' while Captain Rob makes Nugget Nell a gold-queen somewhere, I kin lay a snare for this mountain gold-finch myself. Thar's only twenty years or so between us, but what's that?"

Mountain Moss did not hear these words. The road was almost smooth and the horses were walking along as if the Colorado gold-hounds were in no hurry.

At last the girl's head inclined forward and her chin dropped lightly upon her bosom. The two roughs saw the movement at the same time, and exchanged smiles and looks. All at once Topaz Tom stretched his hand across the beautiful prisoner's horse, and it dropped into Onyx Oll's palm.

The grip that foiled was one of mutual congratulation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BIRD AND HER CAGE.

It was a long ride, but the two sports and their prisoner rode at last into Satanscrown.

Night was just settling down over the place, and the camp's handsomest and most important character was called from Cuban Con's and told that the heiress of Golden Gate had arrived.

"Found? the girl?—Kate?"

"Nobody else, captain. She's just got in under guard," was the reply.

"Who found her?"

"Onyx and Jasper."

"You're all back then?"

"No; Jasper John got his discharge between Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch."

"Killed?"

"Dropped from the saddle!"

"Who did it?"

"That's what we don't know."

"It's better luck than I expected," said Ruby Rob, with a smile. "Where is the prize?"

"They've taken her to your cabin for the present."

"Tell the boys that I'll be thar presently," and the boss of Satanscrown walked away.

The man who reported Mountain Moss's arrival was Agate Alf, and he watched the vanishing sport with a look between a smile and a frown.

"It seems to me, I don't know just why, that ther real play for ther Frisco is just beginnin'," he murmured. "We've got ther Golden Gate heiress—thet's a fact; but we hev'n't got our hands on one dollar ov ther pile. Thar may be some hands played yet that we're not lookin' for. Captain Rob counts ther game won—I kin tell thet by his eyes; but I don't—not by a long shot!"

The captain of the Jewels went to a certain cabin, the door of which opened from the inside, before he could touch the latch.

"She is here," he said, triumphantly, to the woman whom he confronted.

"Kate Lossing?"

"The heiress of the Golden Gate. She was found by the boys between Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch."

The woman was Nugget Nell; her eyes glistened for the first time since she had been led back to camp by Colonel Tarantula her evil genius, and the man who had overtaken her in her flight.

"Are you certain you have found the right person?" she asked. "All depends on the making of no mistake."

"There has been none made. I want you to go down to the girl with me, and offer her a home with you. Remember, you are my sister to her."

Nugget Nell made a hasty toilet, and the two left the cabin together.

"I don't care now if you couldn't decipher the paper we found in Colonel Tarantula's hut," he said to her with a smile. "We have no use for it now that we've got the key to the gold bonanza. It was the only cipher that ever puzzled you, eh?"

"The only one," said the camp Cleopatra, meeting his eye without blushing, and then, anxious to change the subject, she asked:

"What is the heiress like?"

"I haven't seen her, but Agate Alf says she is beautiful. She is dressed in men's clothes, but you will give her a part of your wardrobe, and make her herself again."

It was a short walk to Ruby Rob's cabin, and

two men, Onyx Oll and Topaz Tom, came forward and greeted their chief.

"Well done, boys! excellent!" said Captain Rob, in low tones.

"She wants ter see yer, captain," was the response.

"Is she hard to manage?"

"Oh, no. You an' Queen Nell will have no trouble with her."

Ruby Rob opened the door and went in. Nugget Nell eager and anxious was at his heels.

As the door shut behind the pair, a graceful figure was seen standing at the rough table, and the lamplight fell upon the face of Mountain Moss.

Captain Rob stopped short and almost gave utterance to an exclamation of astonishment.

"You are the person called Captain Rob?" said the girl.

"I am Ruby Rob, and this is my sister, Nell."

The heiress let her gaze wander to Nugget Nell as the sport spoke, and the eyes of the two women met.

"We shall be friends. I know we shall," said the Colorado Cleopatra, advancing toward the young captive, who instinctively drew back under the piercing glances of her eyes.

"I hope I did not come here to stay," she said, and then she turned upon Captain Rob, who had been admiring her beauty and fine figure.

"They told me that you would tell me all," she said. "Why is it that I am hunted down and brought here?"

"Who told you that there was anything to be told?" asked the boss of Satanscrown with a frown.

"The men who made up my escort."

Captain Rob was silent for a moment.

"Yes, there is something to be told," he said, "but this is not the time for the whole story. I have come to offer you a home with my sister. Your stay may not be long here; there is another home for you and one which will suit you better than the shanties of Satanscrown."

"Do you mean Frisco?" exclaimed Mountain Moss, leaning forward suddenly. "Am I then—"

She stopped abruptly and shrunk back.

"What were you going to say?" asked Ruby Rob, eagerly.

"Nothing now," was the response. "I have dreamed so often of Frisco that I mention the name whenever any one seems to refer to it. This is Satanscrown?"

"Yes. You have never been here before?"

"I have not."

"You will find none but friends here. The man who insults you will wish before the insult is dry that he had never been born."

"I don't know why any one should insult me. I have had my best friend killed, and by your orders I fear, Captain Rob."

"By my orders?" echoed the sport, feigning indignation. "Who was your friend?"

"Idaho Ivan. I hope the shot fired after that foul murder found the brain of the man who did the deed! You say the time has not come for me to know why I have been hunted and brought here. When will it come?"

"Before long."

"To-morrow?"

"I cannot say."

"And yet you are alcalde here!" said the girl, in derisive tones. "I want to know why I am Satanscrown's captive, for I am nothing else."

"I must turn you over to my sister," said Ruby Rob. "She will be your friend and companion, and while you stay here no harm shall come to you, and the night of Satanscrown will be your protection."

Fearing that Mountain Moss would question him further, the boss of the camp made a hasty exit from the cabin, and the two women were alone.

"I have seen your brother before," said the heiress.

Nugget Nell started.

"I have also seen the man called Agate Alf, but when and where I cannot say," she continued. "There is a part of my life that is a blank. I remember living in a great city. I was surrounded by riches, but that is all I know. That city may have been San Francisco, because I dream about it so often; it may have been some other city. My name is Mountain Moss. It is a strange name, isn't it? I must have had another some day, but I do not remember."

Nugget Nell looked searchingly at the girl as she spoke.

Mountain Moss was beautiful, and the camp Cleopatra must have thought that a dangerous rival had come to Satanscrown, for her eyes suddenly flashed behind her long dark lashes. If this girl should prove a rival, woe to her!

After awhile the two women walked through the moonlight to Nugget Nell's cabin.

A smile flitted across Mountain Moss's face when she surveyed the interior of the little structure. It was like the one she had inhabited at Trigger Bar.

"Tell me now," she said to Nugget Nell.

"Tell you what?" said the Camp Cleopatra, fastening her eyes on the captive.

"Why I am here, who I am, if you know—tell me all, for I am impatient."

"I don't know," was the reply. "I am to make you as happy as I can."

"I can't be happy here—I shall go away."

"You!" and Nugget Nell came springing toward the girl and clutched her arm. "Do you talk about going away? If you think of doing that you will find Satanscrown a surer prison than the French Bastille. You are here till we say for you to depart. Don't show any spirit here; it will not do."

A new light seemed to break upon Mountain Moss's brain.

"Ah! I begin to understand now," she said. "I am the stake of some game. The shooting of Idaho Ivan was one play in it; there is to be another play here."

"You are right," cried Nugget Nell, and her flashing eyes showed that she was unable to restrain herself. "Yes, my child, you are right; and I don't scruple to tell you now. You are the stake of a game, and there hasn't been a bigger one played in the Northwest since the white man entered it. They killed Idaho Ivan, did they? That was only a part of the game. You are in the hands of men who have sworn to play the game out at any cost. Your cage is a gold one; don't try to break the bars."

Mountain Moss reeled away as far as the hand of the camp Cleopatra would let her. She saw the glittering eyes of Nugget Nell, and the beautiful but triumphant face she showed.

"I have a history, then! I am somebody, after all," said the princess of Trigger Bar.

"You are worth ten times your weight in gold to us!" laughed Nugget Nell. "Why, my mountain robin, we would not hesitate to let out your heart's blood if we feared we were going to lose you forever."

"My God! into the hands of what fiends have I fallen?" came wailing from the girl's heart.

"That's the time you hit it!" cried the Satanscrown queen. "We are fiends—gold-fiends! ha, ha, ha!"

Mountain Moss felt her senses leaving her. She attempted to cry out against the laughing face that almost touched hers, but she had not the power.

All at once she became faint. Nugget Nell saw the symptoms of a swoon; she saw the girl sinking to the floor, and she caught her in her arms.

The next moment Mountain Moss lay on the woman's bed in a faint that resembled death. Nugget Nell standing over her watched her with gleaming eyes for several minutes, and then caught up the lamp with a sudden impulse.

"I will see if it is so," she said. "It will prove whether we have caught the right pigeon."

With one hand she loosened the jacket worn by the girl, and kept on until she had laid bare the white-skinned shoulder.

Then she held the lamp down, with eagerness blazing in her eyes.

"It is there!" she exclaimed, as she looked. "The Jewels of Satanscrown made no mistake!"

On the shoulder thus bared was a tattoo which was plainly seen in the lamplight. It was the deuce of diamonds, smaller, but exactly like the tattoo found on the breast of the Silent Heund, killed a few steps from that very cabin a few nights before.

The deuce of diamonds told Nugget Nell that the hunt for the heirs of the Golden Gate had terminated. It now remained for the plotters to play the rest of the game through. Could they do it?

When she had studied the mark to her satisfaction, the Satanscrown Cleopatra closed the jacket, set the lamp down, and went to the door.

She wanted to reveal her discovery to Captain Rob, to tell him that there could be no mistake.

Suddenly there appeared in the road before her the figure of a man. It came from toward Cuban Con's, the door of which was wide open as usual. Nugget Nell instinctively drew back and fixed her eyes on the figure.

She was certain she had not been seen.

"It is the man whom of all men I hate," she said between her teeth. "It is the sharer of my one secret—the Satan who threatened to drag me back to Frisco, and throw me to the lions of the law! Now is my time!"

She stepped to the couch and snatched a revolver from beneath the pillow under Mountain Moss's head, and bounded back to the door.

Opening it a little, she looked out and saw the man only a few feet away.

"This is the end of our acquaintance, Colonel Tarantula!" she said, savagely.

Her eye for a moment looked over the revolver that covered the man in the moonlight, and then a sharp shot rung out on the mountain air.

A laugh followed the shot, a laugh so full of Satanic derision that Nugget Nell almost dropped the smoking weapon as she leaned forward.

"I'll give you my weapon if you want to try again," laughed the man in the street. "It is warranted not to miss. Better luck next time! You'll see Frisco yet, my Western Borgia!"

Nugget Nell shut the door and went back. Her face was colorless; her eyes had the stare of a frightened person.

"If it hadn't been for you, he would not have come!" she hissed at the unconscious girl.

CHAPTER XVII.

PARDS, RED AND WHITE.

FOR five days nothing occurred to break the monotony of life in Satanscrown.

Mountain Moss still remained an occupant of Nugget Nell's cabin, and in all that time she had not been visited by the man most interested in her—Ruby Rob. The man fired at by the camp Cleopatra had not come back to disturb her, and his saloon had become the common property of the camp. It was presided over by a man who had been chosen by vote, and the toughs of the mountain seemed to rejoice over the events which had resulted in nominally free whisky.

Meantime, Ruby Rob had not been idle; there had been secret consultations at his cabin, and some men noticed that each night two stalwart fellows armed to the teeth watched the roads that entered the camp. This had never been done before in the history of the camp, and to those who did not know that Satanscrown had a young visitor, it was a strange and mysterious proceeding.

It was evident that somebody was expected, and if the roads were watched, who could that person be but an enemy?

In the consultations that took place in Ruby Rob's cabin, the real name of the girl captive was frequently mentioned, and the big fortune lying idle in San Francisco was divided again and again.

An hour after sundown on the sixth day, somebody came to Satanscrown; a hungry-looking man with a miner's kit swung over his shoulder. He looked like a person who had met with terrible luck among the mountains; his clothes were torn and dirty, there was dirt in his hair, his week's beard was a dingy red, and all his toes looked from his boots.

This man was not alone. His companion was a young Indian who had a bright eye and a quick step. He did not present the famished appearance of the prospector, but he said he had been the miner's companion for several weeks.

The couple appeared suddenly to the inmates of Cuban Con's, as the saloon was called notwithstanding its change of owners.

"Famine afoot, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Topaz Tom when his eyes caught sight of the miner. That galoot will eat us blood-raw unless he gets something more wholesome mighty soon."

The pards of the gold-camp gathered around the strangely-mated pair and plied the man with questions. Nobody seemed to take much notice of the Indian boy; he was left to shift for himself, for no person considered for a moment that he might be able to speak English.

The miner said his name was Joel Jagaway, or Jingo Joel where he was best known. He was the victim of a dream or rather a series of visions which he told with a credulity that made even his rough listeners smile. He had dreamed for six nights in succession of a rich deposit among the mountains; he had even seen the solid metal among the rocks, and it appeared that he had but to move upon it to possess fabulous wealth.

It was still the day of rich pockets, of gold-gulches and hidden mines. No story was too wild to be told in Southern Colorado; but Jingo Joel was the first person who had followed the trails of dreamland.

He told a wonderful story of privation in the mountains, of tramps and trails, of hunger and hope. The wild men of Satanscrown listened with open mouths and tilted while they heard. Every now and then the famished man would help himself to the contents of the tall bottle which had been placed on the counter before him. It was not bread, but it seemed to reach the right spot for all that.

"This ar' young buck war ther Good Shmary-ton thet I tumbled ag'in' when I war castin' dice with death," said Jagaway, laying his hand on the young Indian's shoulder. "I never liked ther reds till I got acquainted with this example. They say an Indian ain't good till he's dead, gent's, but I'm ther individual thet says thet's a lie!"

"What is 'e, Jingo? He looks like a Nava-jo," said one.

"That's what he is," responded Jingo Joel. "I war with ther Navvys four years, an' I kin git off their lingo pretty well. This young red ar' Red Buck. He is ther angel what saved me when hunger had ther drop on my earkiss."

Satanscrown was not partial to Indians; the pards showed this by the looks they gave him, but he did not seem to notice them.

"If yer don't like reds in Satanscrown I kin pull out," suddenly said Jingo Joel. "Whar this young buck can't stop I don't want ter stay, an' whar he isn't ez welcome ez I, I don't prefer ter stop even if hunger ar' knawin' at my vitals."

"Nobody's said anything ag'in' ther Injun," said Topaz Tom. "It ar' true thet we never took kindly ter ther crittur, but we don't growl loud when they strike camp."

"I sha'n't stay long, only till I kinder rest up arter wrestlin' with famine all for ther sake ov a dream," Jingo Joel answered. "Whar's yer lunch-shop?"

"We don't keep an establishment ov thet kind in camp. However, we allow no man to go hungry. Come with me."

Three minutes later Jingo Joel and his Indian were seated at a rough little table in Topaz Tom's cabin discussing a cold meal in silence. The Satanscrown sport had placed his larder at their disposal, and had gone back to Cuban Con's. For some time the twain ate in silence, but often their eyes met and exchanged looks.

At last the young Indian got up and went to the little window alongside the door. His eyes had a searching glitter, and for several moments they watched the play—of moonbeams on cabin roofs and along the street.

Jingo Joel ate along at the table until he came back and their eyes met again.

"What do you see?" asked the miner.

"Nothing," answered the Indian in excellent English. "Satanscrown is like all other camps at night—full of shadows."

"What did you think of the crowd at Con's, Pretty hard, eh?"

"Yes, like all Colorado crowds."

"Ruby Rob warn't thar?"

Before the Indian could reply Topaz Tom reappeared.

"Got through, eh?" laughed the big sport when he saw that the man and the boy had cleared the table of nearly every thing eatable.

"We've about cleaned 'er out," grinned Jingo Joel.

"Yer Navvy pard war hungry too, eh?"

"Kinder so."

The Indian pointed to the table, said something Topaz Tom did not understand and smiled.

"If ye'll come down ter ther ranch ye'll see ther hull lay-out," continued the Satanscrown sport.

"We're yer buckleberries, Topaz," said Jagaway. "Come, Red Buck. We'll take in ther panorama with fuller stomachs than we've had in many a long day."

The three went out and entered Cuban Con's a minute afterward.

Ruby Rob was there and the moment Jingo Joel and his pard came in he turned the battery of his eyes upon them.

"They tell me you've been chasin' a dream mine all over creation," he exclaimed, coming up to the miner and locking him in the face.

"I feel thet way," was the reply.

"This red hyer is yer pard?"

"Bet yer life. Be you Ruby Rob?"

"I am Captain Rob."

"Boss ov Satanscrown, eh?"

"If you think so, yes."

Jingo Joel stepped back and looked at the handsome sport.

Something mysterious seemed to lurk in the corners of Ruby Rob's eyes.

"This man an' his pard didn't come in by the roads," he muttered. "They came down the mountain an' struck the camp sideways. If there is any play in this I will find it out. This man may be Jingo Joel, an' he may not."

Captain Rob continued to question the miner until the story of the dream and the gold-mine chase had been repeated almost word for word. All the while the sharpest eyes were fastened on the young Indian, who did not seem to know that he was watched.

At the end of the inquisition Ruby Rob stepped aside, and was followed out by Topaz Tom.

"Did his stories vary?" asked the Satanscrown boss.

"Not a hair," was the reply.

"An' the Injun?"

"Never gave anything away. That youngster is a full-blood Navvy. He kin rattle off ther lingo."

Ruby Rob looked puzzled.

"Jingo Joel is the exact size of a certain man whom I don't want ter see hero now," he said, unconsciously speaking aloud.

"Who is he?"

Captain Rob gave his pard a quick look.

"Who is whom?"

"Ther man you just referred to. You spoke. I did not intend to," was the answer. "What did I say?"

"Thet Jingo Joel looked like a certain man you didn't want ter come ter Satanscrown just now."

"Well, if I said that unconsciously, I say it openly!" said Ruby Rob.

"Name him."

"I will not till I am certain. I think I can test this man."

"Test him, then, an' by ther eternal heavens! if he isn't Jingo Joel, thet'll be ther dearest corpse in Satanscrown it ever held!"

"I will proceed to apply the test. Go back into the saloon and get where you can watch Jingo Joel without being seen yourself. Keep your finger at the trigger of your revolver. I shall shout a certain name in front of the ranch. If he starts or changes color at the name, cover him instantly. You understand me, Topaz?"

"Thoroughly," said the lieutenant sport. "If he gives himself away, he'll look into ther muzzles ov ther handiest dropper in Colorado!"

A minute afterward Topaz Tom walked back into Cuban Con's, and leisurely stationed himself where he could obtain a good view of Jingo Joel.

The seconds flew by while he waited for the name that was to test the miner's honesty.

Jagaway stood along the counter, in the midst of half a dozen mountain men, but Topaz Tom was looking into his face.

"Hello, in thar!" suddenly rung out a voice on the outside. "I want ter see a man called Pious Phil, ov Trigger Bar!"

The Satanscrown toughs looked toward the door and laughed; Topaz Tom's fingers tightened at the butt of his revolver; he raised the weapon to his hip.

The call had been heard in every part of the saloon. Jingo Joel had heard every syllable, but he had not showed a sign of astonishment. The face of the young Indian was as immobile as ever.

"This isn't Trigger Bar, you fool!" shouted several miners. "Thar's no such a man hyer as Pious Phil."

Half a dozen men went to the door, but saw nobody. The caller, whoever he was, had disappeared.

After awhile Topaz Tom slipped out, and was joined by Ruby Rob among the shadows of the cabin.

"Well?" asked the Satanscrown boss eagerly.

"He never flinched, captain, an' ther red never stirred."

Ruby Rob looked astonished.

"I guess ye'r' fooled," continued Topaz Tom.

"I would have bet a thousand on it," said Captain Rob. "If I am fooled, I acknowledge the corn; but I'm not done with that couple. Watch them as you would two rattlers. I don't swallow the story o' the dream mine."

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLONEL TARANTULA'S NEW HAND.

"SUTHIN' hangin' over this camp. I don't know what it ar', but I feel it in my bones all ther same."

Onyx Oil used this language and his listener was Topaz Tom. The latter had lately left Ruby Rob, and the scene last enacted in the camp saloon was still uppermost in his mind.

"I don't take much stock in premonitions, Onyx. I can't say that I ever felt comin' events in my bones, but suthin' ar' likely ter happen since we've found ther heiress ov ther Golden Gate. I'm of ther opinion—"

"Hush! thar's ther white galoot's Injun."

The two men looked toward a certain cabin not far away and saw in the doorway the figure of Red Buck, Jingo Joel's Indian friend.

"Now, who says that suthin' ain't goin' ter happen?" whispered Onyx Oil at his companion's ear. "Tell me thet it ar' no put-up job with thet young buck standing in thet door."

For some moments the two big sports watched the person who had been discovered.

It was late, and over Satanscrown hung the pall of night and the silence of death. Here and there were seen the shapes of various cabins whose inmates seemed to be sound asleep. The saloon had closed for the night as if its frequenters had inaugurated the habit of retiring early, and so still was it that the tread of a prowling coyote was almost enough to disturb the hour.

The Indian boy became a statue in the cabin door while the two pards regarded him with half-drawn revolvers in their hands.

Topaz Tom leaned forward in his eagerness.

"Mebbe ther cap'n ar' right," he muttered. "He called ther half-starved miner Pious Phil ov Trigger Bar, an' he says, ther cap'n does, that he ar' willin' ter stake a thousand ounces on his jedgment."

Topaz Tom brought his mutterings to a sudden close for the young Indian left the cabin and was gliding away.

Onyx Oil touched his companion's arm and put his lips close to his ear:

"Boots off!" he whispered.

The two pards leaned against the cabin at their back and drew their boots.

"What did I say about suthin' going' ter happen?" continued Oil.

Topaz Tom said nothing; his eyes were fastened on the Indian boy whose gliding figure was just discernible among the shanties. In a little while Red Buck had two mountain sleuth-bounds at his heels. They were ready for a leap at any moment, and woe to the boy if he should in any manner show them that he had entered Satanscrown on mischief bent.

Red Buck seemed to have a certain mission to perform for he kept straight on and did not stop within the limits of the camp.

"Goin' back to ther mountains," ejaculated Onyx Oil. "Kin it be thet he gave Jingo Joel ther slip?"

Topaz Tom looked into his companion's face but made no reply. It was evident that the sport was puzzled.

The Indian boy was gone, the camp did not hold him now, and it was his mission to the mountains that puzzled the two sports at the edge of the gold-camp.

It was no use to follow the young Navajo; there were a dozen dark trails to be taken, and the shadows that fell over them made the darkness almost palpable. Still, the sports did not like to turn back.

"Hello!" suddenly ejaculated Topaz Tom, as

a noise struck the ears of both. "What was that?"

As the words were spoken the sports happened to glance in the same direction and both saw at the same time the flicker of a match.

"Somebody has opened Cuban Con's place," said Onyx, touching his companion's sleeve.

"By heavens! it is a stranger!"

By this time the two men had ceased to think of the young Indian, and rapid strides were carrying them toward the famous saloon.

The lamp over the end of the counter had already been lighted, and the two Jewels saw a small-like man behind the bar.

"Hello! pard!" said Topaz Tom, appearing in the doorway as he spoke.

The man turned and looked at the speaker.

"By Jove! I'm glad ye've come," he said.

"I bought this trap awhile back—"

"Bought it?" interrupted Ruby Rob's lieutenant. "I'd like ter know who pretended ter hev ther sellin' ov it."

"The man thet owned it, I guess," was the answer accompanied by a smile.

"Who war he?"

"Colonel Tarantula he called himself. I caught 'im on his way ter Texas an' he sold me this ranch for seven hundred, and gave me a written pledge ov former ownership, an' a deed ov transfer."

"Thet's mule-proof cheek," laughed Topaz Tom.

"What! didn't he own it?" cried the little man, who did not look very dangerous as he came from behind the counter. "Can it be possible that I have been swindled out o' my seven hundred? He swore he owned the ranch, that he bought it ov Cuban Con—"

"So he did, but when Colonel Tarantula left, ther ranch dropped inter our hands an' we elected a barkeeper an' overseer."

"The infernal wretch!" cried the stranger. "I am without a dollar in the world. I hev been shamefully taken in, an' I am ag'in thrown upon ther cold mercies ov ther world. You won't keer ef I take a drink, will you?"

"Take a dozen ef you want 'em," said Topaz Tom, whose rough sympathy had been stirred by the stranger's plea of poverty and wrong.

The stranger turned with an audible sigh to the bottles, and poured out a drink. Holding the glass up to the light, he said:

"I hev ter depend on ther charity ov strangers for a drink! I've seen more ups an' downs than any man livin'. I've been millionaire an' Lazarus, but never afore, gentlemen, war I in a snap like this. Ain't thar an opening ov some kind for me hyer?"

The two sports shook their heads.

"Nothin' I kin do, eh?"

"Nothin' jest now," said Topaz Tom.

"Blame me ef this ain't hard," was the response, and the speaker helped himself again from the same bottle.

"If this ranch isn't mine, I'll go," continued the stranger. "Mebbe I'll follow Colonel Tarantula and make him disgorge. He war on his way ter Texas, an' a man like him isn't hard ter find. He's bound ter make himself known wherever he goes. I thought I war a property-holder awhile ago, but I don't own a shingle."

"You needn't leave camp yet ef yer don't want ter," said Onyx Oil. "Suthin' might turn up for yer in ther mornin', but it's not at all likely."

"Think so?" cried the man, catching at a straw.

"It's likely thet suthin' will not turn up," said Oil.

"I don't think I'll stay," was the response, slowly spoken. "A pilgrim like Tom Hardesty might as well meander on. He's down in ther valley ov despond now; by an' by he may be on ther hill ov joy, but it's almighty doubtful. Good-by, gents."

The little man held out his hand.

"Pon my soul, I hate ter leave two men ov honor like you ar', but ther world ar' full ov partin's such as this; it is, by Jerusalem! Should we never meet again, remember thet for three days I war, in thought, owner ov Satanscrown's ranch an' a happy man."

The two sports could not refuse the proffered hand, and when they had shaken it Tom Hardesty turned away.

"It war an unexpected meeting," said he in quite different tones, when he was a few feet from the two sports. "I did not expect to run across Topaz Tom and Onyx Oil so soon. If I could have taken possession of the ranch without discovery, I would have held the fort. They didn't know me; of course not. My reign here occurred while they were away."

The man who spoke thus walked to the edge of the camp and stopped.

He was among the darkest shades that prevailed, and nobody saw him. If he could have seen Topaz Tom and Onyx Oil, his eyes would have followed them to a cabin which they entered, not far from the saloon.

At the end of an hour Tom Hardesty walked back into Satanscrown. He seemed to know the place. This time he did not stop at the closed saloon, but passed it and did not halt until he could touch Nugget Nell's cabin with his hand.

"They won't let me keep saloon," he said. "Then, by Jupiter! I'll do something worse."

He crept to the little window beside the door and looked in, but the interior of the cabin was dark, and silent, too.

After a little while he knocked lightly near the bottom of the door, and waited for a response. It was some moments before one came.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice from the inside.

"Ther captain," said Hardesty.

The next minute the door opened and the man slid into the cabin.

"Light the lamp," he said.

Nugget Nell found the lucifers and the lamp, and proceeded to obey.

She did not look at her visitor when the match flashed up, and did not see the smile with which he waited for the lamplight.

As the light brightened, it revealed the figure of a young girl on the cot. She was sound asleep, and the eyes of Tom Hardesty seemed to gain an additional luster when they found her.

"It is all right now," said Nugget Nell, turning from the lamp. "You see she is with us yet. I—"

The camp Cleopatra broke her own sentence, and shrunk suddenly from the man before her.

Not until then had she discovered that it was not Ruby Rob who had entered the cabin. Instead of the stalwart figure of the boss of Satanscrown, instead of his fine eyes and magnificent mustache, she saw a smaller man with glittering orbs, and a full, though short, black beard.

"I am 'captain,' but not the man you expected to see," said the woman's visitor, coming toward her. "Don't move! don't send forth an alarm. If you do, you will never see the sun-light any more!"

Nugget Nell had recoiled to the wall, and was a statue of fright.

"I am playin' one of my boss hands—nothing more," continued Hardesty. "I see you have found the Golden Gate girl at last. It has been a long hunt, hasn't it, Nell? There are others in Satanscrown at this very moment who consider her the stake in their game. I came last, but I am first. What did you think of the old cipher?"

"You did it. My God! when is this shadowing to end?"

"When it can serve me no longer," said the man, sternly. "Do I look like Colonel Tarantula?"

"To me, yes. No other man on earth has eyes like yours!"

"By George! that is complimentary," laughed the colonel, for Nugget Nell's visitor was no one else, and then he glanced toward the sleeping girl.

"Have you administered your favorite opiate?" he said to Nell.

A smile came at once to the woman's mouth, and her eyes rested for a moment on Mountain Moss.

"You need not answer me," Colonel Tarantula went on. "I still adhere to my belief often expressed to you—that in your veins is the blood of the Borgias. You should have lived in Italy three centuries ago; this is not your field, woman. But I see that you have not forgotten the opiate and the poi on."

He gave her a cold glance as he finished and went to the girl.

Nugget Nell saw her sleeping sweetly under his eyes. All at once he bent over her.

"Don't you think this girl will become your rival if she stays here?" he said, coming toward her suddenly.

"How so?"

"She is the heiress of the Golden Gate—you know that now. Ruby Rob wants her millions; he and the mountain roughs he has drawn about him have been playing for them ever since the girl was lost after the murder of her father. She has beauty, with her wealth, and Captain Rob is easily ensnared. Why should he like you, anyhow? If he knew what I know, you wouldn't be Queen of Satanscrown another hour."

Nugget Nell uttered an exclamation of fear.

"Do you know that there is a clause in Major Lossing's will which prevents her from enjoying more than one-half of the bonanza until after marriage?"

"No."

"There is such a clause; I have read it myself. Now, don't you see what Ruby Rob must do to get the millions? He must become that girl's husband—not after mountain fashion, but according to law."

The camp beauty shut her lips and threw a fierce look toward Mountain Moss.

"Give me the girl," said Colonel Tarantula. "Refuse to let me take her now, and you may suddenly lose your grip on Ruby Rob. You cannot hold him when he hears of the marrying clause of the will. The girl is sleeping under your potion. You have the antidote; a few drops on her lips will do the business. You can then take the opiate yourself, and to-morrow ere the sleep has worn off, they will find the girl gone. You were drugged by somebody in your sleep and robbed. Don't you see?"

Colonel Tarantula was looking down into her face with eyes that fairly laughed for triumph.

"It would be treachery," said Nugget Nell, hardly above a frightened whisper.

"Have you never been treacherous?" was the quick retort. "My God! if I could unroll your record, Satanscrown would blush. Come! I am not here to parley. I didn't expect to play this hand so soon after coming into camp. Circumstances have forced me to it. Quick! where is the antidote, and where the opiate?"

Nugget Nell raised her hand and touched an unseen spring in the wall. A door opened and revealed several small vials. She selected two and turned toward Colonel Tarantula.

"If I do this, will you bother me no more?" she asked.

"I make no promises. Go to work."

The mountain princess walked to the cot and bent over the sleeping girl. Colonel Tarantula watched her closely.

He saw her uncork one of the vials and let several drops of a greenish liquid fall upon the girl's lips.

"Now, the other for yourself!" said the colonel.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MAN OF DEEDS.

"You have no mercy," said Nugget Nell, turning upon the cool man, as she took the remaining vial in her right hand and clutched it tightly. "You don't know what Ruby Rob will do when he finds the Golden Gate heiress gone."

"I am not afraid that he will kill you. No, my mountain Jezebel, he will not do that. The deep sleep in which he will find you and the story you will tell him when you awake, will deceive him. Come, now. Try the opiate upon yourself. I will remain to see the effects."

The gold-camp Cleopatra seemed to realize that she could not escape. She looked toward Mountain Moss, and saw her deep-blue eyes wide open and full of wonderment.

Then she raised the vial and held it for a moment between her lips.

"It is done," she said, looking at the cool Texan. "I will sleep until after sunrise."

For a moment longer she stood erect before Tarantula, when a drowsiness was seen to steal over her eyes, and she lay down at the foot of the girl's bed.

Colonel Tarantula leaned forward with eagerness in his looks, and watched her steadily for several moments. Did he think that the Colorado enchantress was deceiving him? She had taken part in so many games, she had deceived so many people, why should he trust her?

"What has happened? Who are you?" asked Mountain Moss, drawing back from the colonel as he bent over Nugget Nell to study the effects of the powerful narcotic which seemed to have taken effect already.

"I'm your friend. Do not disturb me for a minute. I want to see if this woman is playing possum."

Colonel Tarantula took the lamp and held it close to Nugget Nell's face.

"I don't know," he said, shaking his head doubtfully. "She has played so many shrewd games that one does not know when to trust her. I'll settle it, however."

The vial was still clutched in the woman's hand. Colonel Tarantula removed it and placed it against the finely-chiseled lips.

"Heavens! if that is an opiate, you will give her too much," exclaimed the Golden Gate heiress, catching the sport's arm. "You might give her quite enough to kill."

"The world would be better off if I did," laughed the colonel as he snook off the girl's hand. "She will sleep till after sunrise to-morrow. Ah! if she was shamming, she was too determined to betray herself."

Mountain Moss looked up at the strange man. Who could he be?

Several minutes later, Colonel Tarantula turned suddenly upon her and touched her wrist.

"You will go with me, now," he said.

"With you?" exclaimed the amazed girl.

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"The enemy of those who have hunted you. They know that. Isn't that enough?"

"It ought to be, but I don't know you. I never saw you at Trigger Bar."

"I've been there, but not lately," answered the colonel with a smile. "You are going with me, I have just said. My name? You will know all about me by and by."

Mountain Moss got up.

There was something about this man that fascinated her. She had never seen him before, but he had offered to take her from Satanscrown and from Ruby Rob who a captive she was.

"I will go," she said to him. "Anything is preferable to this."

Colonel Tarantula's eyes seemed to snap with delight. He went to the door, opened it a little, and looked out.

When he stepped back he held out his hand to Mountain Moss, and threw a quick but searching glance at Nugget Nell asleep on the cot.

"The sun will beat her up," he laughed.

"She will be deuced lucky if she awakens before he sets." And then he took the girl's hand and led her from the cabin.

All was dark inside now, for the lamp had been extinguished; beyond the cabin door myriads of stars shone upon Satanscrown, and dark clouds were following each other in rapid succession across the disk of the moon.

"No words now," whispered Colonel Tarantula at the girl's ear. "We are in a regular tigers' den, and safety depends on silence."

They moved down the now darkened street toward the western end of the camp. The colonel's hand held the girl's wrist, and she kept step with him, for she was eager to leave the place of captivity. Maybe her deliverer was going back to Trigger Bar. Her friend Pious Phil was there, and there might be a chance that Idaho Ivan was not fatally shot the night of their attempted flight.

If Mountain Moss had glanced down at Colonel Tarantula's disengaged hand she would have seen a large revolver.

Cabin after cabin was passed without an alarm. The couple were nearing the end of the gold-camp; the girl saw the last cabin, beyond which was safety!

All at once Colonel Tarantula stopped and looked over his shoulder.

Mountain Moss looked back, too, but saw nothing suspicious.

"Stand still," whispered the Texan to the girl, and his hand fell from her wrist.

As she watched him she saw him glide away, but not quite out of sight. He leaned toward one of the cabins and appeared to be waiting for some one.

Colonel Tarantula's sharp ears had heard something, but his eyes, keen as they were, had not confirmed the presence of a tracker. He touched the walls of a cabin while he listened, armed now with the silent bowie instead of the loud mouthed revolver.

Suddenly he started just the slightest.

"I was right," he said to himself. "A dog is on the trail."

At that moment he had caught sight of a human figure. It was coming toward him along the cabins and over the very trail he had just made.

Colonel Tarantula waited coolly for the tracker to come up. He knew it was no animal, but a human being.

At last but three feet separated the pair, the ready watcher alongside the cabin, the trailer from toward Nugget Nell's abode.

Suddenly, like the dart of a rattlesnake, but without its noise, the man from Texas went toward his prey.

There was a sudden leap upward as the two persons met, and the beginning of a cry. The cry was never finished, for a hand found a throat too soon.

Colonel Tarantula did not speak, but raised his hand and then brought it down quick, and for a purpose!

The next moment he was looking at the person whom, to all outward appearances, he had killed instantly.

"I'm a bad man to track, probably the worst west of the Mississippi," he growled through clinched teeth. "When I play a hand as big as the one I'm playing now, I'm doubly dangerous."

He dropped his victim, who lay still in the starlight, and went back to where he had left Mountain Moss.

"I didn't know they had Indians in Satanscrown," he said, taking her hand again.

"Why?—did you see one?" asked the girl.

"I left a young buck back there as dead as a herring," was the reply. "The red was on our track, but he'll never trail another Texas Tarantula."

"I remember now that Nugget Nell told me that a man and a young Indian came to camp to-night," the Golden Gate heiress said.

"That Indian was the one, then," whispered the colonel. "A white man and an Indian, hey?"

"Yes."

Colonel Tarantula was silent for a moment, and Mountain Moss caught him looking toward the spot where he had left his victim.

"White men don't pard with reds in Colorado nowadays for nothing," he said, looking down into her face. "I'm going back to look at my game."

Once more he left her alone and went back.

The young Indian lay where he had fallen, and apparently he had not moved.

"Hyer yet as a matter of course," muttered Colonel Tarantula, as he bent over the body. "A white man and an Indian together, eh? I'll see about this."

His fingers rapidly opened the brown shirt worn by the youthful red-skin, and then he bent lower until he almost touched the skin disclosed by this action.

"Just about as I expected. This is no Indian," he suddenly ejaculated. "The two are pure sure enough!"

The flesh beneath his eyes was white and fair. His victim was a white person, like himself.

Colonel Tarantula's eyes exhibited a good deal of mystery when he got up.

"I've an idea about him," he said, regarding his victim. "I'm not the only person who is after the Golden Gate heiress to-night, but, by the Fates! I'm the only one who is successful!"

"Well, what did you make out?" asked Mountain Moss in a whisper when the Texan rejoined her and once more took her hand.

"Not very much," he said. "He war thar yet."

This did not satisfy the girl. She seemed to know that he was trying to conceal something. She halted and drew back.

"Let me go and see," she said.

"You?" he exclaimed. "What do you want to look at a dead Indian for?"

"I claim a right to go back. I believe—"

She stopped suddenly, for he had bent over her, and was transfixing her as it were with the most piercing eyes she had ever seen.

"What do you believe?" he hissed. "When I say I've killed a young Indian, what makes you doubt it?"

"I cannot help it. Something tells me that your victim was my friend."

"Friend or no friend, he is dead now!"

Mountain Moss shrunk the full length of the colonel's arm, and regarded him with a face entirely colorless.

"I want no monkeying hyer," he went on. "The dead is dead, and that is enough. I came hyer to take you from Satanscrown. I know all about you from your cradle up."

The girl uttered a startled cry.

"Do you know all that?" she exclaimed.

"I know your whole history. Come with me and hear it, but not hyer."

He started on, the white-faced girl at his hand.

Suddenly a cry was heard that stopped them both:

"Halt!"

Colonel Tarantula's lips came firmly together as he wheeled with his revolver, ready for the fray.

"Hands up! I've got ther death-drop," continued the same voice.

Mountain Moss saw no one, but the cool Texan did. He saw the stalwart man that stood in the starlight a few feet away.

"It is a game two kin play at, Colonel Tarantula. Drop ther girl's hand and throw up both ov yer own!"

The Texan did neither. On the contrary, Mountain Moss felt his grip tighten at her wrist; she saw but one hand go up, and that one held the revolver.

The next second the report of the weapon rung out on the air, and the figure of a man reeled from before Colonel Tarantula and fell with a sickening thud on the ground.

"I throw up my hands, girl, but whenever I do somebody drops!" he laughed savagely. "I guess my shot will stir out the hornets. I don't want to fight all Satanscrown. Two in one nightar' enough!"

With the last word he threw his arm about the girl's waist and lifting her from the ground strode rapidly away. In his right hand he still carried the deadly six-shooter.

CHAPTER XX.

TOPAZ TOM'S DISCOVERY.

As a matter of course events like these turned the gold-camp upside down.

The ringing report of the Texan's revolver opened more than one cabin door, and a dozen half-dressed men seen stood in the moonlight, clutching heavy six-shooters and Wizebesters, and looking wildly about for the person who had fired the shot.

It was not long before Colonel Tarantula's second victim was found on his face a bullet-hole in his forehead, and his bronze fingers encircling the butt of a pistol.

The toughs of Satanscrown turned him over and found him to be Gold-dust James, the man taken into the league in place of Diamond Dave, the deserter. The man of course was already dead, and the landed pards swore revenge over his corpse.

"Go to Jingo Joel's cabin—quick!" said Ruby Rob to Topaz Tom. "This killing proves that that scabot was Pious Phil of Trigger Bar. You will find the shanty empty. I'd bet a thousand on it!"

The lieutenant of the gold band started off with Onyx Oil at his heels.

"Mebbe ther Injun we tracked from camp did it," whispered Oil to his companion.

"That young red? I doubt it," was the answer. "But hyer we ar', Onyx." And the two sports were at the cabin occupied by Jingo Joel, the half-starved miner and his Indian pard.

The hand of Topaz Tom was about to descend upon the latch when the door opened suddenly in their faces, and Jingo Joel stood before them. The two roughs naturally recoiled.

"Come in," said the miner holding the door open. "I've heard that Satanscrown didn't like Injuns, but I didn't think my young pard would get ther knife so soon."

The two men glanced at each other and stepped inside. The little tin lamp that illuminated the interior of the cabin showed them a rough cot and upon it the figure of the young Indian.

"Thar's ther work ov a devil!" said Jingo Joel madly, through clinched teeth as he pointed toward the boy.

"Dead!" cried Onyx Oll, as he went forward. "Not dead, but he ar' edgin' up ter death's counter with his chips."

"Shot?"

"Bowied!" said Jingo Joel, sententiously.

Onyx Oll was bending over the youth, who was breathing heavily and apparently unconscious.

"I found him where he fell," continued the furnished miner. "It was after ther shot, which must hev missed—"

"No, it killed a man—Gold-dust James," said Oll, giving Jingo Joel a searching and half-accusing look.

"This boy didn't do it!" cried the stray miner, and the next moment he had stepped to the cot and was glaring at the two pards. "Red Buck got the bowie afore the shot war fired. I'm no man ov blood, gents, but I say hyer, 'Woe ter him who cut my Injun pard!' I kin hunt men as well as mines, if necessary."

"Thet's bizness," said Onyx. "Whar did ther young red git ther knife? We'll jest take a look at ther wound—"

"No, I have dressed it," interrupted Jingo Joel, and his skeleton-like fingers fell restrainingly on the sport's arm. "Let ther young buck sleep."

Did Topaz Tom see the look of fear in the depths of the miner's eyes? A quiver ran over Jingo Joel's flesh as he pushed Onyx Oll back from the boy, for whose wound he was about to look.

"I'm somewhat ov a surgeon," he said, "an' my pard shall hev ther benefit ov my skill. I don't want him disturbed now. If ther death of Gold-dust James has roused ther camp, you kin say that I know nothin' about it. I only know that I found this boy bowied after ther shot."

The two men went away, and beyond the cabin Topaz Tom suddenly caught his comrade's wrist.

"Onyx, what d'yer think?" he asked, in an excited whisper.

"About what?"

"Ther pair back thar."

Onyx Oll shook his head.

"It was curious that he wouldn't let me look for ther youngster's wound."

"I know why he wouldn't. That boy is white!"

"White?" echoed Onyx Oll.

"White, as you or me," was the reply. "I saw suthin' thet confirms it, an' thet's why I didn't insist on ther examination. That also confirms ther captain's belief. Ther man back thar is Pious Phil ov Trigger Bar, and consequently them two ar' after the Golden Gate heiress."

"Ef I thought so, by Jupiter! I'd go back thar an' show 'em a hand that 'd settle ther hull play," said Onyx Oll sending a tigerish look toward the cabin. "Let's go back."

"Not now. They won't go away. Ther boys hev opened up ther ranch; mebbe they've taken Gold-dust thar."

Onyx Oll and Topaz Tom went toward the saloon where doors had been opened again. Already the population of the gold-camp had assembled there, and an indignation meeting was in progress.

The body of the dead man had been taken to his own cabin, but the name of Gold-dust James was frequently mentioned, and always in connection with threats of vengeance.

The men did not know that a person called Tom Hardesty had that same night opened the ranch claiming that he had purchased it from a man called Colonel Tarantula. If they had known this, and either Onyx Oll or Topaz Tom could have given the information, they might have found a name for Gold-dust's slayer; but the two sports kept the information to themselves.

Captain Rob was not at the saloon, but the two pards had not been there long before he appeared at the door and called them out.

It was easily seen that the boss of Satanscrown was excited. His eyes blazed like madstones, he leaped at Topaz Tom in his eagerness and clutched his arm.

"The girl is gone!" he said.

"General Mountain Moss?"

"The Golden Gate heiress," said Ruby Rob between his teeth. "Come down ter Nell's. I want ter show you something."

The two sports were too amazed to speak again, and Captain Rob made no reply.

He led them to the camp Cleopatra's cabin and threw wide the door.

A lamp was burning on the table, and Nugget Nell lay across the foot of the couch.

"Dead, by heavens!" cried Topaz Tom.

"Not dead, but in a sleep from which I can't rouse her," was the reply.

Nugget Nell looked like a corpse as she lay in the light of the lamp which Ruby Rob held over her so as to let the two sports inspect her.

"She has been drugged! The girl did not do it for she had no weapons of that sort."

Onyx Oll and Topaz Tom uttered one name at the same time.

"Tom Hardesty!"

"Who is that?" asked Ruby Rob. "Is that another name for the man with the red boy?"

"No. Tom Hardesty is ther galoot who wanted ter take possession ov ther ranch sayin' he had bought it from Colonel Tarantula."

"When?"

"Ter-night; only a little while afore Gold-dust James got his everlasting."

"Tom Hardesty, eh?"

"That's what he called himself."

"Describe him. When you see a man, Onyx, you never forget him."

Ruby Rob looked into his pard's face and waited anxiously for the description.

Onyx Oll proceeded to describe minutely the person who had called himself Tom Hardesty; nothing was omitted; the description was a photograph completed.

"The Texas tarantula came back sure enough!" said Ruby Rob, at the heels of the last word. "Tom Hardesty was Colonel Tarantula and this is his work," and the boss of Satanscrown pointed toward Nugget Nell. "I know this woman. She hates that man as she hates the name of Frisco. She was once his wife."

The two sports started.

"Nugget Nell Colonel Tarantula's wife!" ejaculated Onyx Oll.

"She once held that accursed position," said Ruby Rob. "The courts divorced them; afterward I found her. But this is not for us to discuss now. Tom Hardesty is Colonel Tarantula; I'd bet a thousand on it. He came here, he found the women asleep; he drugged one an' took the other; he was seen an' followed by Gold-dust James whom he shot. Isn't this ther solution of the whole puzzle? We don't need detectives in Satanscrown."

"It's plain ter me since I see that Colonel Tarantula an' Hardesty ar' one an' ther same person," said Topaz Tom. "If I had not finished Colorado Carlos at Trigger Bar I would have thought him guilty of this play."

"It wasn't him. Carlos was a giant in stature; Colonel Tarantula is big only in coolness an' cunning. Nugget Nell may sleep her life out. Who knows what kind of an infernal potion he administered? We know now that we must fight for the Golden Gate heiress an' the big bonanza. This Texan is on the trail; the cards ar' in his hands now. If Gold-dust an' I had shot him when we robbed him of the cipher he took from the Silent Hound's corpse the bonanza would be ours now. But as it is, he shall not keep it! We must outwit this man. He is dangerous an' cool, but for all that he shall never keep the hand he holds at present. Ther Northwest is a thousand times too small to hold him an' Ruby Rob an' pards! Will he go straight to Frisco with his prize? The bonanza is thar. Thar is a small tattoo of the deuce of diamonds on the girl's shoulder that will prove her identity. I swore to take her thar myself, an' you took a solemn oath to help me. The position of Gold-dust James, when found, indicates that he was shot by somebody whom he war tracking west. Colonel Tarantula has already gone toward Frisco. It is far away, an' thar shall be death for him between hyer an' thar. We won't renew our oath, boys. The first one holds good. We have had ther Golden Gate bonanza in our hands, but it has slipped through for the present; we have felt the biggest find between St. Louis an' the Pacific, an' that takes in a vast territory. We go to work at once. Colonel Tarantula is to be tracked down, the enemies of our success ar' to be killed whenever they ar' found! Let the colonel go till daylight. He can't get far. The girl will give him trouble when she knows that he wants only her fortune. We have two spies to look after hyer."

"Who are they, captain?"

"The man who calls himself Jingo Joel an' ther Injun his pard."

"We have just come from thar," said Topaz Tom. "Ther pretended buck got ther length ov a bowie in camp ter-night."

Ruby Rob started forward with a light cry of astonishment.

"Got a bowie?"

"Yes."

"It warn't by Gold-dust James, for he had no knife when he war killed. The colonel did that, too."

"I don't know about that," said Tom. "We went ter ther shanty an' found Jingo Joel an' his pard, ther boy, asleep, Jingo on ther watch. I made a diskivery, captain."

"Well, what was it, Topaz?"

"Ther boy is white."

Captain Rob started slightly, but did not exhibit much surprise.

"Confirmed ag'in!" he said, as his eyes suddenly glistened with triumph. "I know the boy now. It is Idaho Ivan, the girl's friend at Trigger Bar."

"That boy?" cried Onyx Oll. "I shot him from the saddle the night Jasper an' I got ther bonanza girl between Trigger Bar an' Tartarus Gulch."

"It warn't a death-shot else he wouldn't be hyer," smiled Ruby Rob. "He an' Pious Phil came after Kate. They were outwitted by Colonel Tarantula, who probably did not know that they war in camp. Look at ther two hands

besides ours that ar' bein' played for ther Lossing millions! We must go ter work. Pious Phil did not give himself away when I called his name in front ov the ranch. Inside ov thirty minutes he will admit before Satanscrown that he is the lean Alcalde ov Trigger Bar. Let's begin the new game at once. The stake is the same—the Frisco millions an' the Golden Gate heiress."

Ruby Rob strode from the cabin with the two sports at his heels.

Nugget Nell was left behind in the deep sleep which resembled, and might, in the end, prove death.

The three pards, with cocked revolvers in their right hands, went toward Jingo Joel's cabin, and Ruby Rob threw the door open.

"Hel—" he began, but at the threshold he stopped and stared.

The lamp on the table fell upon the faces of the three gold gamblers, and they saw Jingo Joel standing over his young pard with a six-shooter in each hand.

"You came hyer ter kill," he said, "but the death-drop is mine!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BULLET FROM WITHOUT.

THE situation was not one of the best for Captain Rob and his pards.

The lean mountaineer who stood just beyond the open door of the cabin was looking over two large revolvers which he held with surprising steadiness for one of his build.

Ruby Rob had come to the hut with a charge on his tongue; he was going to call this man Pious Phil, of Trigger Bar, but the unexpected tableau present almost took his breath.

There was time enough yet to meet and pay the invader of Satanscrown for his audacity.

"We've come ter see how ther boy ar'," said Topaz Tom, the first of the three to speak after Jingo Joel's greeting.

"Does it take three ter see?" asked the miner, cuttingly. "Gents, let me inform yer thet ther boy—ther young red—ar' gittin' along tolerably. I'll issue ten-minute bulletins if ther camp demands it."

Ruby Rob looked at the boyish figure lying motionless on the cot beside which Jingo Joel was standing.

"That's not necessary," he said to the miner. "We'd like to know who cut him."

"Thet'll all be developed some day," answered Jingo Joel, through clinched teeth. "When I find out ter a certainty suthin' human will drop."

An embarrassing silence followed the last word. Ruby Rob and his two pards exchanged rapid glances. Their mission to the visitor's cabin had come to an inglorious termination. Jingo Joel held the fort in a manner which proclaimed his ability to keep the ground.

"If the boy is goin' to live, we'll go," said the boss of Satanscrown. "Topaz said he had been bowied, an' I came hyer ter say thet, Injun though he ar', he shall hev help if he needs it."

"He doesn't need any, gents."

The three sports stepped back, and the miner's revolvers dropped.

A moment later the cabin door closed, and Jingo Joel bent over the boy on the cot.

"Thar war more tall lyin' done inside o' five minutes than I ever got onter afore," he said with a smile, as he encountered the youth's gaze. "Them three toughs came hyer for blood, but they went away without spillin' a drop. It ain't ther last ov 'em, Idaho; we'll hear from them ag'in if we stay hyer. We've got ter strike ther blow to-night."

"Whenever you say so," was the reply. "I will be able to go to the horses. Once there, I will be safe. I did not see that knifer stop, come back and wait for me. I am certain he was the man we had to fear most—Colonel Tarantula."

"He could have been no one else," was the reply. "He knows who Kate is, an' he will play a bold hand for the Golden Gate bonanza. We must move now."

"All right. You know where she is?"

"Yes. She occupies the same cabin as Nugget Nell. We will wait thirty minutes. Don't try ter get up, Idaho. Somebody might come along an' take a notion ter look in at ther window. Thirty minutes ar'n't long."

"They'll be a year to me," said the youth, with a smile. "I don't feel my wound now, Jingo. Thanks to the locket-case which turned the bowie aside! It is a bad wound for all, but it won't prevent me from getting to the horses. We are to meet there."

"When I am gone you will go straight to ther critturs. They ar' a mile from camp, but you kin take yer time. If ye git weak, stop an' rest."

"I will get there," said the youth, gritting his teeth and clinching his hands. "All this is for Kate. I don't care for her fortune, any more than I don't want a dollar of it to fall into the hands of those who are playing for it."

"It never shall. You kin bet yer head on thet!"

"Not even Colorado Carlos?" asked the boy.

"He doesn't want it," was the reply. "The mountain Ishmaelite isn't playing for it. He

wants the girl restored ter her rights. I am convinced ov that. Topaz Tom will some day diskiver thet ther man he shot on sight at Trigger Bar is ther liveliest corpse thet ever touched a trigger. Colorado Carlos is eccentric, Idaho, but he's on ther right trail this time."

"He will not turn up to defeat our plans, I hope."

"I left him on his back at ther Bar. I made him b'lieve he war in a bad way, though he is able ter play some cool cards if he only thought so. He will not interfere with us, Idaho."

The thirty minutes decided upon by Jingo Joel, who, as the reader has surmised before this, was Pious Phil, and the boy Idaho Ivan, Kate's friend, soon passed away.

The miner went to the door and looked out. Once more the camp was still, although there was a light at the saloon where a few toughs had resumed cards, or were still discussing the death of Gold-dust James.

"Let me be gone five minutes," said Pious Phil to the boy, "then slip out an' go to ther hosses. Make no noise; play like ther coyote for stillness, an' take yer time. I will get thar with ther Golden Gate seraph."

He slipped out and was gone. Idaho Ivan waited a little while and then got up. He was pale and looked weak, but his eyes had a determined glitter.

The lamp had been extinguished and the street was almost as dark as the interior of the cabin.

He could see nothing of Pious Phil when he went out; the silence of the camp was unbroken.

"Now for the horses!" he said, with firmness.

The next moment he was moving slowly toward the western end of the camp. His footsteps sent forth no sound, but he was listening for the enemy all the time.

Pious Phil, he thought, was doing his duty; he had found Kate in Nugget Nell's hut, and was devising some means to capture her. Idaho Ivan felt that the success of that night's play depended on the lean Alcalde of Trigger Bar.

"What d'yer say?" whispered a man who rose suddenly behind the boy, creeping through the camp. "Shall it be on sight, as usual?"

The speaker threw up his hand, and a revolver covered Idaho Ivan's gliding figure.

"No; no noise now," was the answer. "The pard might be near, an' ther report would spoil a play, perhaps."

"Then this, eh?" and the revolver was quickly exchanged for a bowie.

"No, only your hands."

"All right, cap'n."

If Idaho Ivan had turned at that moment and used his eyes with effect, he would have seen a man separate from a group of three. This man swooped upon him like an eagle upon a dove, and all at once two hands encircled his throat like the coil of a lariat.

The cry that started toward the youth's lips never reached them; it died in his throat as the infernal fingers tightened!

"Jingo Joel's Injun, gents!" laughed the catcher, as he bore his half-unconscious captive back to the waiting pards. "I never miss when I play hand-lasso, ha, ha! Look at 'im. Come close, Cap'n Rob."

One of the men leaned forward and his eyes gleamed triumphantly while he gazed into Idaho Ivan's face.

"We've got the young Trigger Bar bird, sure enough," he said. "Now, back to my shanty with him."

The three men started back, and Ruby Rob held open the door of a certain cabin to his companions.

Idaho Ivan was still in the clutches of the stalwart ruffian who had captured him. The fingers seemed to meet around his windpipe; he was almost unconscious.

In this condition he was borne across the threshold of the cabin.

"Darken the window, Onyx," said a voice, and the boy saw one of the desperadoes doff his jacket and hang it over the little window beside the door.

"Water," again said the same voice, and a jug was taken from one corner of the hut.

"Now, Onyx, make the Injun white."

The youth knew what was coming, and as Topaz Tom's hands fell suddenly from his throat he caught his breath and said:

"You need not go to that trouble. I am Idaho Ivan," he said.

The three pards laughed.

"I would hev bet a thousand on thet, boy," said Ruby Rob. "You came hyer from Trigger Bar for a purpose. Yer pard is Pious Phil, ther alcalde."

The boy looked into the men's faces, but made no reply.

"Thar's no use in concealin' it," the boss of Satanscrown went on. "He warn't born ter hoodwink me. Now answer me right along."

The youth met the rough's gaze firmly. "Phil has found Kate by this time," he thought. "He is pushing toward the horses. These men know that Kate is the Golden Gate heiress. If I keep them here, I make our game certain."

Then he said to Captain Rob:

"Go on. I am in your hands."

"In the first place, you came here with Pious Phil from Trigger Bar?"

"Perhaps."

"We know that. You ar' playin' a game for gold?"

"So you say."

"You came hyer ter find a young girl who was an inhabitant ov Trigger Bar not very long ago."

"Yes," said Idaho Ivan, firmly.

"How came she to reach your camp in the first place?"

Here was a chance for Idaho Ivan; he almost betrayed himself with a start when he saw it.

"Do you want the whole story?" he asked.

"Yes."

The young miner leaned against the table and went leisurely to work. He was going to talk against time; he wanted Pious Phil to get to the hidden horses with the heiress of the Golden Gate.

He began a narrative that progressed slowly. It was the story of Kate's coming to Trigger Bar; he went into the particulars. The three men listened eagerly, they did not seem to comprehend his purpose: five, ten, twenty minutes flew by. Not until then did Ruby Rob and his pards see the boy's adroit scheme.

"See hyer! Ye'r talkin' against time," suddenly cried the camp boss. "The girl is Kate Lossing, the Golden Gate bonanza? Answer that question."

"They call her that."

"An' don't you know that it ar' death for anybody ter try ter beat us at our own game?"

"Who's tried to?"

"You!"

The eyes of Captain Rob had a malicious glitter. Before Idaho Ivan could reply, he looked up at Onyx Oil.

"Go to the door!" he said.

The sport stepped forward and guarded the entrance.

"The devil's snare, now, Topaz," he continued.

The next instant the bronzed fingers of Topaz Tom were again at the youth's throat. Captain Rob stooped and lifted a part of one of the rough planks that formed the floor.

"Your trail ends hyer, Idaho Ivan—ends forever!" said the boss to the young miner. "This bonanza is for the Jewels of Satanscrown, an' for no one else! Colonel Tarantula has carried off the gold-pigeon, but his flight will end a long distance this side of Frisco. We will wade through blood if necessary for the Golden Gate bonanza. You have parted company with Pious Phil forever!"

Idaho Ivan heard the last words as his eyes seemed to swim in a mist. He was lifted from the floor and hurried through space.

"This pit is the devil's snare," said Ruby Rob pointing at the opening in the floor. "Nothing checks us this side the gold bonanza. Now, Topaz!"

The big sport held Idaho Ivan over the pit. His grip was loosening when there came a loud report mingled with the crash of glass.

Topaz Tom with a cry fell forward!

The shot came like a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

Onyx Oil sprung back from the door which he had been guarding and, revolver in hand, turned upon it with the mien of a lion.

Captain Rob leaped forward and fearlessly flung it open.

"Death to the killer of my big right-bower," he cried, and then he halted in the doorway and glared at the figure that rose before him on horseback.

"I have only taken my own, Ruby Rob," said this person, as he thrust a smoking revolver into the face of the astonished boss. "Topaz Tom shot me on sight at Trigger Bar. I have served him the same trick—that is all!"

Ruby Rob seemed unable to speak, but all at once the man behind him uttered a name.

"Jupiter Pluvius!" cried Onyx Oil. "It is Colorado Carlos!"

The man in the saddle smiled.

CHAPTER XXII.

A THREATENED NEW DEAL.

COLORADO CARLOS it was sure enough—the man we saw last at Trigger Bar wrestling with the wound given by Topaz Tom's revolver—the person who sent Pious Phil after Kate because he was not able to go himself.

Brave as he was, Captain Rob knew better than to lift his drawn weapon against the man who was glaring at him from the saddle, and Onyx Oil stood behind him like a spell-bound person.

Behind the boss of Satanscrown and against the cabin wall, lay the big sport who would assist him in no more wild games. The bullet that had crashed through the window had found Topaz Tom's brain. In all probability Colorado Carlos had ridden close to the cabin, looked in upon his enemy, taken aim, and fired.

Where was Idaho Ivan?

The boy had disappeared!

To Ruby Rob and Onyx Oil this mounted slayer had come when he was not expected. They might have looked for Pious Phil, the young

miner's pard, but the mountain Ishmaelite—never!

"You may plant that man in thar," said Colorado Carlos, glancing over Ruby Rob's shoulder at the stalwart figure at the foot of the wall. "It is only bullet for bullet; he shot on sight, so did I. Good-night, gentlemen. Whenever you want to play a pistol game, you will find Colorado Carlos at your service."

He rode away with exasperating coolness, and his last look was a challenge which neither of the toughs cared to accept.

"Cool as Satan," said Onyx Oil, between his teeth. "Who looked for that play?"

"Nobody," said Ruby Rob. "The truth is, that when I opened the door I expected to see Pious Phil, or Jingo Joel as he tried to call himself. I left Carlos at Trigger Bar, wrastlin' with death. Now, thar he rides with Topaz dead behind him."

"Mebbe he isn't dead," and Onyx Oil crossed the room and stooped over the man who had tumbled from the eccentric man's revolver.

One look was enough and Captain Rob had no need to ask a question when his pard turned toward him.

"Shot through ther head," said Onyx Oil.

"But ther boy—Idaho Ivan?"

"He fell from Tom's hands inter ther snare ov course. He war holdin' him over it when Carlos fired."

"Then he is out of the game forever." And Ruby Rob threw a glance down into the yawning pit beneath the floor.

The next moment the opening was closed again and Captain Rob extinguished the light.

"Onyx," he said, touching his pard's hand in the darkness. "Three millions among three ar' one million apiece."

"Thet's easily divided," was the response, "but we hev'n't got 'em yet, cap'n."

If Onyx Oil could have seen the sudden flashing of Ruby Rob's eyes he would have recoiled.

"Do yer think we're goin' to fail?" cried the Satanscrown boss. "Because Topaz, Jasper an' the new recruit, Gold-dust James ar' dead, d'yer think we're not goin' to get thar? Ar' we to fail after eight years' search for the Golden Gate heiress when we hev found her, even had her in our hands? Ther play may shift, thet's all. It may be transferred from Satanscrown to Frisco, but when the final stakes ar' raked in the divide will be ours. Ef you want to throw down yer hand, Onyx, throw it down; now or never. Agate Alf an' I will go unflinching to the end."

"I go thar, too!" was firmly spoken in the darkness of the cabin. "Take thier play wherever you will, Captain Rob; you'll find Onyx Oil at yer back!"

That was enough; the cabin door opened and shut again, and the mad sports of the gold-camp were gone.

"I am to thank Colorado Carlos for this miraculous deliverance," said a voice, in undertones, and a human figure crept from under the rough table which stood near the trap in the floor when opened. "I did fall from Topaz Tom's grip, but not into the pit, thank Heaven! The consternation caused by the death-shot insured my safety, and the table and its shadow shielded me from the two sports' keen eyes. I will yet get to the horses."

Idaho Ivan did not remain long in the cabin whose silent tenant was growing rigid against the wall.

His escape had been a most remarkable one and fortune had played him a good hand when he looked for no favors from her.

He was eager to escape from the camp and reach the hidden horses which had brought him and Pious Phil almost to Satanscrown.

A strange doubt had taken possession of his mind. What did Ruby Rob mean when he told Onyx Oil that the gold game might be transferred to Frisco? Did the desperado-boss believe that the Golden Gate heiress had been taken thither?

Unable to answer interrogatives like these, he crept from the cabin.

Colorado Carlos had played his game and had probably left the camp. He had carried out the unwritten law of vengeance, and, wounded himself, had doubtless gone back to Trigger Bar.

Idaho Ivan was not molested while he made his way from the gold-camp. His progress was cautious and slow, for he still felt the wound inflicted by Colonel Tarantula's bowie, but he reached at last the place where the horses had been left for a certain emergency.

The spot was deserted.

Idaho Ivan could hardly believe his discovery. He stood among the dark rocks of the secret ravine and felt ready to give up.

A strange sickness came over him. Where was Pious Phil who had gone to take Kate Lossing from Nugget Nell her guardian?

Seconds seemed hours, minutes whole days of anxiety to the young miner of Trigger Bar. He was alone where he had expected to find the horses, Pious Phil and the rescued girl.

"The unexpected has happened. We have failed somewhere," said the boy to himself at last.

All at once he heard a noise down the ravine. It was like the loosening of a stone beneath a human foot, and the sound, though slight, was

as the snapping of a Winchester's lock to the youth.

He hugged the almost perpendicular wall at his back, and listened. Was it man or beast? Had the last three desperate men of the Satans-crown Jewels tracked him with the certainty of the bloodhound?

He heard the noise again; the maker of it was approaching. Idaho Ivan placed his finger at the trigger of his six-shooter.

Another minute would decide; it was here!

Although the young gold-digger could not see his hand before his face so dark were the depths of the ravine, he knew that somebody was standing within five feet of him and directly before his face. He tried to locate the person, but this of course he could not do.

"Thar's no hosses hyer!" suddenly spoke a coarse voice that seemed to cut the gloom and silence like a cleaver.

Idaho Ivan went forward with an ejaculation of delight. The man he touched recoiled as if a panther had closed in with him.

"Jehosaphat! you, Idaho?"

"It is Idaho, Phil. Where are the horses, anyhow?"

A moment's silence followed the question.

"They're not hyer—thet's certain," said the lean alcalde. "When did you come, and who fired that pistol in camp awhile ago?"

This forced the young miner to a narration of his adventures which he told in the fewest possible words.

"Now," said he, finishing, "now, Pious Phil, why are you here alone?"

"Simply because I didn't find ther Golden Gate beauty," was the prompt reply. "When I got ter Nugget Nell's cabin she war already gone. Its only occupant war Nell herself, and in a sleep thet a double-gear'd ague couldn't shake her out ov."

"Dead?" cried the boy.

"Ther next door ter it," was the answer. "Somebody war ahead ov me. Whoever he war he got ther girl."

"It must have been the man who stabbed me," said Idaho Ivan.

"It war nobody else; an' you say that person war Colonel Tarantula."

"That is what I heard him call himself, before I became unconscious."

"So he has taken a hand in the game, has he?" Idaho Ivan heard Pious Phil grate. "Boy, our play didn't amount ter much. Ther war risk in it an' much ter win, but we've lost. Our hosses ar' gone; we have lost Kate when she war within our reach, an' you hev felt ther p'int o' Colonel Tarantula's bowie."

It was a cold statement of a terrible calamity, and Idaho Ivan leaned against the rocky wall like a person in despair.

"We can't play ther Jingo Joel an' Red Buck game any more," the lean alcalde went on. "Captain Rob more than suspected me ther moment he sot eyes on us. I war ready for anything when he called my name from outside ov ther whisky ranch; thet's why I never flinched. Topaz Tom came in a moment beforehand and stationed himself afore me. If I had stirred he would hev kivered me in ther drop ov an eye. It war a cool job well played, but it failed."

"What is to be done now?" asked Idaho Ivan, eager to have the next move mapped out.

"I don't know," said Pious Phil, slowly. "My 'pinion 'bout ther hosses is thet they ar' whar Kate is."

The boy miner gave a quick start.

"Then you believe that Colonel Tarantula found them?"

"I do."

"Oh, for the drop on that schemer!" cried Idaho Ivan. "Who is he, Phil? You know."

"Colonel Tarantula included," smiled the lean alcalde. "He never turns up only when he has a big game ov some kind on hand. Who is he? You had better ask me who he isn't."

"How did he get onto the secret of Kate's life?"

"Heaven knows. I made a diskivery ter-night, but it wasn't much of a one either."

"What was it, Phil?"

"I found ther colonel's former wife."

"In Satanscrown?"

"Nowhar else. She was ther woman I couldn't waken."

"Nugget Nell?"

"That's what they call her hyer. When she attached herself ter the colonel, she war known as Viper Bess. Mebbe," continued Pious Phil, with a laugh, "mebbe if I had whispered that name at her ear she would hev opened her eyes. That woman is wanted in Frisco; yes, I am certain she is the one."

"Wanted for what?"

"For a crime as black as midnight."

"For murder?"

"Worse than that!" grated the lean alcalde.

The boy gold-digger started and caught his pard's arm.

"There is no crime blacker than that, Phil!" he cried.

"You don't know," was the reply. "She didn't kill her victim, but if he could wish, he would wish himself dead. By Heavens! when I saw her asleep in her hut, I could hardly keep

my fingers from her throat for she must be that woman. But, boy, this is not findin' Kate."

"No, it is not," said Idaho Ivan.

"Ov course, Colonel Tarantula is 'playin' for the three millions which wait for the lost child of the army major. What will he do?—Stay hyer an' play ag'in' Ruby Rob an' pards? No; he will play his next hand miles an' miles from hyer."

"In Frisco?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," replied the alcalde.

"Then, to Frisco!" exclaimed the young miner. "We must baffle this man of coolness and cunning! We must transfer ourselves from camp to city. I have seen Frisco, but it was years ago when I was a mere child. No difference, though. I will learn it over. We will become two foxes against this Colonel Tarantula."

"Who knows ther city from corner to corner?" said Pious Phil. "But I kin tell yer one thing, Idaho. I know it as I know old Trigger Bar."

The young miner uttered an exclamation of joy.

"If ther next scene ov this gold-play opens thar, it'll find me at home," the alcalde went on. "But don't forget thet Ruby Roban' pards may also appear thar in time."

"And Colorado Carlos," said the boy.

"Ah! ther mountain Ishmaelite. I had almost forgotten him. Come, Idaho. I feel it in my bones that we must go ter Frisco. The game will end thar!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN OLD FRIEND TURNS UP.

IT is three weeks later, reader. We are far from Satanscrown; we are in San Francisco.

We forget the straggling cabins of the gold-camp with a light here and there in the elective blaze that surrounds us. Satanscrown is lost in the magnificent business blocks, hotels and residences of the famous city of the gold-coast.

In a certain private office connected with one of the wealthiest banking houses of Frisco sits a large, fine-looking elderly man, apparently waiting for some one. It is long past business hours; the money marts will not open again till tomorrow; the gold-kings, the most of them at least, have retired to their palaces on Nob Hill.

The gentleman mentioned above would not be in his private room at the hour of which we write—seven o'clock P. M.—if he had not received during the day the following letter:

"LEROY LA CROIX:—

"DEAR SIR:—I think I have information of the utmost importance to you, and would like an interview. It is about a fund which you have guarded for over eight years. I shall call at your private office on Montgomery street at a quarter past seven this evening. Please do not disappoint me. I cannot come in the daytime. Respectfully,

"THE COLONEL."

"Who in the name of wonders is 'The Colonel'?" exclaimed La Croix when he read the letter, which came to him by the last mail delivery of the day, and then he began to rack his brain. He could not settle on any particular person. "The Colonel" might be some person he had never seen, and he ended by resolving to give the person audience in his private office at a quarter past seven.

Leroy La Croix was one of the prominent rich men of San Francisco; he was the main trustee of the enormous fund left to Kate Lossing, the Golden Gate heiress, by her father's will. For eight years he had had the use of the money and it was said that he had largely increased it by judicious investments.

The banker was a little past fifty, a widower with no children, and his sole ambition seemed to be the accumulation of money. Every now and then he was bothered by persons who claimed to have discovered a clew to Kate Lossing, but he had punctured every claim and exposed the fraud. He was inclined to believe that the Golden Gate heiress was dead, but he never failed to give audience to those who professed to have a clew.

On this particular evening La Croix was waiting quietly for his correspondent. The clock had struck seven and he was counting the minutes that were bringing on the interview.

At precisely a quarter past, a slight rap roused the banker, and he opened the door to admit a well-dressed man of medium height, with no surplus flesh, keen-eyed, rather good-looking, and comparatively a stranger to the business circles of San Francisco.

His face was covered with a fine dark beard which matched his long hair very well.

"Mr. La Croix, I presume," said the visitor, lifting his hat to the banker as he came forward. "I am the gentleman who wrote requesting an interview at this hour."

"Ah! then you are the—"

"The Colonel," finished the caller, with a smile. "I am Jordan Gilbert, sometimes called 'The Colonel,' hence the signature to my letter."

He shook hands with the Frisco nabob and dropped into a chair.

"I received your letter, sir," said La Croix, "and decided to grant you the interview asked."

"Thanks. I thought you would favor me. I am here to talk about the daughter of Major Lossing, who disappeared over eight years ago while on an overland trip eastward from this city."

"He was murdered," said the banker, quickly. "The body and his team were afterward found."

"All of which is known to me. You are the main trustee of the fund he left by will to his only child, Kate?"

"I am."

"What is the total amount of the fund at the present date?"

The colonel seemed very eager, and the banker might have noticed that he tried to check himself before he reached the end of his sentence.

"Sir, that is a question which cannot be readily answered, and, besides, it is one with which the trustees only have to deal just now. We make yearly reports to the proper authorities; our last one is on file if you wish to consult it."

"Pardon me," said Gilbert. "I did not mean to be suspiciously inquisitive. I wrote you that my visit had to do with that legacy. It does. I have found the Golden Gate heiress!"

If the colonel expected to see La Croix leap from his chair at this intelligence, he was mistaken. The Nob Hill nabob did not move, nor did he manifest the least surprise. It was an old story to him; he had been told more than a hundred times within the last eight years that Golden Gate Kate had been found, and one by one had proved the "finders" to be cranks or schemers.

Here was another, he evidently thought, from the manner in which he received the colonel's information.

"I shall prick this bubble as I have the rest," he murmured.

Then he looked again at his visitor and asked quietly:

"Where is the girl?"

"Where I can lay my hands on her," was the answer. "I know what you're thinking about, Mr. La Croix. You have been fooled before; you think I haven't found Golden Gate Kate, but as sure as Frisco is in California, and we've got the dead wood on thet, eh?—I have the girl whose millions you keep!"

"Prove it."

Leroy La Croix, banker, looked confident when he spoke these two words. Here is where he had stopped those who had preceded the colonel on this same business. It was one thing to make an assertion, quite another one to prove it.

"Oh, you think I can't!" laughed Colonel Gilbert, and then he suddenly settled back to seriousness. "What is the reward?" he asked.

"It was ten thousand."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough? Do you want to make the heir a pauper?"

"See here, Mr. Leroy La Croix," and the colonel leaned forward and dropped his hand softly upon the banker's knee while he looked him in the eye. "Well informed people believe that Golden Gate Kate's bonanza at this time amounts to three and a quarter millions, and you talk about begging her by taking ten thousand from it! Say, wouldn't you sooner pay twenty thousand to learn that Kate would never turn up?"

"I, sir?" exclaimed La Croix.

"You; it is worth something to handle a sum like that known in Frisco as the Lossing millions."

The Montgomery street banker assumed to become indignant.

"If you came here to say this, we will terminate the interview," he exclaimed, about to rise. "I granted you this audience not expecting to be subjected to insult."

"Now, don't go off like powder," was the reply, and the colonel leaned back coolly in his chair, like a person who was not to be driven. "I've dealt with men all over the West, and I know them pretty thoroughly. You would like me to tell you how I know I have found Golden Gate Kate. I will tell you; sit down."

The last words were almost a command and La Croix, biting his lips, obeyed them.

"Dashwood, the mute, is dead," the colonel went on. "He died in a mountain camp called Satanscrown. He was robbed of the daguerreotype and the paper which he carried under the sole of one of his boots. You knew that man?"

La Croix nodded slightly.

"I searched his body after death and found this."

The speaker drew a piece of paper from his pocket and tossed it into the banker's lap.

"That paper is from you. It is your promise to Dashwood to give the girl every dollar of her fortune upon the presentation of that paper by her. You know that Dashwood would keep it till he found the girl, or was killed. Well, he did. He had three mountain camps to search when he died. I took up the trail where he left off. I found the lost girl."

The Frisco gold-bug looked up from the document in his hand and repeated two words he had said before.

"Prove it."

The colonel's hand descended into his pocket again, but soon reappeared.

"Look at that," he said, in a triumphant voice, and the banker's face suddenly blanched as he leaned forward.

A plain gold ring was lying in Jordan Gilbert's hand. It was too small for the finger of a lady, and had probably been worn by a little girl.

"How's that for high?" grinned the colonel.

Leroy La Croix could not speak; his eyes were fastened on the ring, and seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"Where did you find it?" he asked at last.

"Where I got the girl, of course," was the answer. "On the inside of that ring is the inscription, 'From Louis Lossing to his darling, Kate.' Does that prove anything, eh? Didn't you think that some day a man like me would turn up? Why, I've been hunting that hoop of gold and its owner ever since they were lost."

The eyes of the two men met.

"Where is the girl you call Kate Lossing?" asked La Croix.

"Where I and nobody else can put eyes on her," answered the colonel, with a self-satisfied and half-defiant smile. "I am here to present the girl to her fortune, but I will tell you now that I don't want this paltry ten thousand reward. I've been hunted because I have found Golden Gate Kate. I am hunted yet."

"By whom?"

"Never mind. I haven't been the only person who has trailed the owner of the Lossing millions. I am the successful one—that is all."

"When could you produce this girl?" asked the Frisco banker, with mingled fear and eagerness.

"At any time. When do you want to see her?"

"Is she in the city?"

"See here; I am my own master yet!" exclaimed the colonel. "I haven't lived all my life among the gold-mountains and the chaparral trails of the Southwest. Frisco is as well-known to me as my favorite camp in Arizona. If you refuse to believe that I hold the gold queen, I will produce her and astonish Frisco."

Leroy La Croix leaned forward with an exclamation of horror.

"No! wait till we can talk," he said.

"What's the use? The money is waiting for her! You are but one of the trustees, the head one, I will admit. There is a clause in Major Lossing's will which says that Kate shall receive the whole fortune at once on her marriage. What if I should tell you that she is my wife?"

"But she is not!" cried the white-faced banker, springing up.

"You do not know," laughed the colonel. "You don't want to hand over the whole sum at once. Maybe we can compromise."

"That is true," said La Croix, catching eagerly at the suggestion.

"I'll take a million!"

The four words seemed to take the banker's breath.

"And you will not produce the girl?" he gasped.

"You don't want her produced, then?"

"Not if we agree that she shall not be. A million, sir, is a large sum of money."

"It's a bigger pile than I ever owned," said the colonel; "but take it from the girl's bonanza and you have still the lion's share."

"I have guarded it for eight years."

"And I have hunted Golden Gate Kate for the same length of time! You have sat here in your office and fingered money all the time; I have risked my life a thousand times for the person I have found at last. My pay ought to equal yours, I think."

"What! a million and a half?" cried La Croix.

"Why, you have no mercy, man!"

"Not much, that's a fact," smiled the colonel. "I'll produce the girl, I guess, and rake in the whole bonanza. I've got the big hand, all aces, and sure to win! I didn't lie when I told you in my letter that I had news that affected the trust fund. My next move will be my best one. The girl is a daisy, Mr. La Croix. She is worth her father's millions. I'll bid you good-night, now. You'll see me later."

The man caught up his hat and started toward the door.

All at once La Croix sprang after him and caught his arm.

"Come and see me again without the girl. No! where will I find you?" he said.

"Not this eve, some other, probably," laughed Gilbert, and before the amazed banker could recover, he was gone.

"Thunderbolt number one," chuckled the visitor as he struck the street. "By the jumping jacks! I am at the doors of the Golden Gate bonanza. Three an' a quarter millions! Jupiter Pluvius!"

He walked away with an elastic step, and did not look over his shoulder to see the two persons already at his heels.

"We have found him at last, an' in ther nick o' time!" said one of the pair. "He has been ter ther gold-bug playin' his first hand in Frisco. We'll toss down a kerd er two now thet 'll take his breath. We must not losesight of thet man,

for he is Colonel Tarantula, an' he knows whar ther Golden Gate heiress is."

And the nabob's caller walked on, dogged by the human sleuths.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CORNERED IN FRISCO.

SAN FRANCISCO is a city in which the wildest dreams of wealth have been realized. The stranger visiting it for the first time sees riches everywhere, in the magnificence of its buildings, its elegant drives, its parks, and even in the general appearance of its inhabitants.

If he remains awhile, he will see its plague-spots, its sand-hills and Chinatown.

Chinatown is the hell of the Celestial; it is the cancer which the gold-coast city cannot get rid of; it burrows in its vitals, and poisons the air that permeates it.

Dupont street is the most densely populated portion of Chinatown; the worst block is bounded by Jackson and Pacific streets, as some of our readers may happen to know by observation.

Colonel Tarantula led his pursuers into this part of the city.

What was taking him into the depths of Chinatown?

"He didn't bring ther girl among ther heathen, I hope," ejaculated one of the trackers.

"Why not, if he thought he had us at his heels? You don't think he'd put up at ther Occidental, do yer?"

"Thar's no tellin' what thet cool hound wouldn't do. Ah! he is lost! Forward! we must keep track of that man."

Colonel Tarantula had disappeared at the mouth of one of the numerous dark little alleys of Chinatown.

The two trackers darted forward; they were at the spot in a moment, but even then they were too late. The man from Texas was gone!

"He may have seen us," said one. "He certainly has no eyes in the back of his head."

The two men drew their revolvers and plunged into the alley. Everywhere were the rookeries of the yellow people; they heard their chatter on every side.

Colonel Tarantula could have turned on those men and killed both. Did they not think of that?

By and by they reappeared with disappointment stamped on their faces; the colonel had eluded them sure enough.

Half an hour later a man walked into the office of one of the largest hotels in the city. He was large, well dressed and looked like a person who had struck it rich in the mines.

"Do you know that man yonder?" said a lean man, to a well-built youth who saw the large person at the minute the question was asked.

The boy leaned forward and the next moment his eyes glistened.

"Ah! it is Colorado Carlos!" he exclaimed, looking up into his companion's face. "He has put aside the broad-brimmed white hat and the laced jacket, and the sash. He has recovered from the wound Topaz Tom gave him at Trigger Bar as I have recovered from Colonel Tarantula's stab."

The man called Colorado Carlos walked into the magnificent bar attached to the hotel and called for a drink.

The moment he crossed the threshold of the place he was seen by a man who was apparently on guard.

"To be shot on sight—that's ther order," muttered this person. "Topaz Tom did thet once at Trigger Bar an' made a poor job ov it, for Carlos afterward tumbled him in Satanscrown. I won't carry out my orders now. Frisco ain't ther gold-camp, and they hev reg'lar law hyer, which I don't like."

The speaker continued to eye Colorado Carlos who evidently did not see him.

In a little while the mountain Ishmaelite left the bar-room, smoking. He sent volumes of fragrant smoke curling above his head and passed through the office without halting.

"Let us follow him," said the boy to his companion. "Maybe he has found a clew to Kate."

The pair got up, the lean-faced man in the advance; but they had not taken three steps forward when Colorado Carlos halted at the sidewalk.

It was evident that the self-appointed president of the Git-Thar Bank had found some one. He drew back just inside the door and waited.

A man came in who did not look much like Leroy La Croix's late visitor, but a very close observer would have detected a little similarity between them.

Colorado Carlos never took his eyes from this man; he saw him walk to the elegant desk and perhaps heard the clerk address him as Mr. Geffroy.

It was easily seen from the clerk's obsequiousness that Geffroy was a guest of the Occidental.

After a few words with the clerk he took a key and walked into the bar-room. The man on guard there, the same one who had recognized Colorado Carlos, saw him, but did not start.

Having taken a fifty-cent drink, Geffroy

came out and, taking the elevator, soon disappeared.

Colorado Carlos stepped rather carelessly to the register and turned its leaves till he saw the following entry;

"JORDAN GEFFROY, Portland, Or."

He might have noticed, too, the room to which this particular guest had been assigned.

Ten minutes later the mountain Ishmaelite entered the elevator and requested to be carried to the fourth floor.

There was a strange light in the man's eyes, and he exhibited a good deal of eagerness during the brief ascent.

When he left the elevator he went on straight to a certain room as if it was his own quarters. All was silent beyond the door.

With a triumphant smile lurking at the corners of his mouth the mountain Ishmaelite rapped lightly and heard a quick step on the inside.

"What is wanted?" asked a voice from within.

"Nothin', colonel. I'm Lion Dick!" said Carlos.

"That can't be!" was the response as the door was jerked open. "You come just when I want you. I—"

The speaker broke his own sentence for Colorado Carlos was inside showing by his eyes the success of his little scheme.

"You don't see Lion Dick!" laughed the Ishmaelite, "an' I reckon you don't want me just now!"

Geffroy was staring at the speaker as if his eyes were about to fly from his head.

"Don't you know me, colonel?" continued Carlos. "I am Colorado."

"Jupiter Pluvius! I'd rather see the dead here."

"Or Old Nick!"

A moment's silence followed the chuckle that supplemented Colorado Carlos's last response. It ended when he took a quick step toward Geffroy and went on:

"Colonel Tarantula, that last play of yours at Satanscrown war a good one. You have transferred the game ter Frisco, an' I am hyer because ov the change. Sit down! The door is locked. I turned the key when I shut it an' I have it safe in my pocket."

Geffroy, or Colonel Tarantula, as he stood thus unmasked before Colorado Carlos, looked for a moment like a man about to fly at the face of a mortal foe. He drew back as if for a spring but the mountain Ishmaelite seemed to know that no attack would be made.

"You beat me ter Frisco with the Golden Gate find, colonel. I didn't try ter git ahead ov you. What kind o' hand have you played to-night?"

Did Colorado Carlos know that he had visited Leroy LaCroix, the trustee of the millions? Had the mountain man played detective and dogged his footsteps since sundown?

He shut his teeth and said nothing for a minute, during which time Colorado Carlos waited with exasperating patience.

"You have tracked me!" suddenly said Colonel Tarantula.

"Not a step, but I will from this hour on," was the reply. "I will become your shadow unless you throw up the game and leave the city."

This was the hight of impudence in Tarantula's eyes.

"It is one thing to follow a man, another to run him down," he said. "I see the hand of Colorado Carlos in this bonanza game. It was you who robbed Ruby Rob of the boot that contained the Silent Hound's statement and Golden Gate Kate's miniature. You can't rob me of anything."

"You forget the girl."

"By heavens! you will have to find her first!"

The words of the last sentence made up a boast and a challenge.

"Listen to me," said Colorado Carlos coolly.

"We want to see the Lossing millions pass from the hands of the trustees. I want the girl to have her own; you are playin' a game for yourself, not for Kate."

"That is a bold accusation."

"I will repeat it if you didn't catch it," the Ishmaelite said.

"Never mind. You make yourself understood."

"You have brought the girl to Frisco. Don't tell me that you have not. I want to see her, to-night, now!"

Colonel Tarantula's lips parted in a derisive smile which was almost instantly checked by the giant's look.

"Frisco isn't Colorado and her gold-camps." Colorado Carlos went on. "We want ter understand one another thoroughly, colonel. I am goin' ter ask a question which I want answered without a growl. Whar is the heiress ov the Golden Gate?"

Colonel Tarantula received the interrogative with close set teeth. He expected it, and thought he had prepared for its reception. It startled him for all that.

"Come! no false plays hyer!—no cold decks in Frisco," continued Colorado Carlos and before the Texan could leap up and draw, the

mountain Ishmaelite had thrust a cocked revolver into his face.

"Will you take me to Kate or shall I find her after your funeral?" came over the shining barrel of the weapon. "Touch the pistol on your hip and the wall behind you will have to be papered over! It is ace ag'in' ace, colonel. You've played games ov this kind afore. Shall I proceed to manipulate this trigger, or will you show me the major's heiress?"

What could the thunderstruck colonel say?

He had led two trackers into the depths of Chinatown and there lost them to hurry to his hotel to be confronted by an enemy who was proving to be the most dangerous one he had.

The eyes of Colorado Carlos fairly blazed behind the weapon. He held it with a steady hand and his bronzed fore-finger was at the trigger.

"Make up your mind, colonel," he said. "I don't sit here all night waitin' for a man who is always quick ter decide. This is a game ov two, an' more."

"An' more?—what do you mean?"

"You'll never know if I am forced ter leave you hyer dead," said Carlos. "Whar is the Golden Gate queen?"

"Curse you! you hold a hand that makes me throw up mine," was the response. "I'll show you the girl."

A quick gleam of victory lit up the Colorado-an's eyes.

"All right. We go down an' out tergether. At the first sign ov treachery I'll blow yer brains out, be it in this hotel or on the street. You may play successful games in Texas, colonel, for smaller stakes than three millions, but you lose the biggest game man ever set his heart on. Come, now, we go down in the elevator. If ye'r achin' ter put on white wings, just show Colorado Carlos a sign ov treachery!"

"I have a chance yet an' a good one," said Colonel Tarantula, under his breath. "I know the city like a citizen, this man does not. He has me now, but I'll show him a play that isn't down on the bills. Take him ter the Golden Gate heiress an' see the three an' a quarter millions disappear like a snow-flake! I'd walk bare-shod through Tartarus first!"

He got up and appeared ready to go.

Nobody suspected that of the two men who stepped out of the elevator a minute later, one was under the surveillance of the other. Nobody, do we say?

"For Heaven's sake, look yonder!" exclaimed a boy, looking up into a man's face as he spoke. "Colorado is going off with some man—with—yes! it is Colonel Tarantula!"

"Then we will follow. Those two men haven't united their fortunes? I will not believe it!" And man and boy left the hotel with eyes fastened on the two desperadoes hurrying down the lighted street.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE FATE.

MEANTIME, asks the reader, what has become of Mountain Moss, the Golden Gate heiress?

Let us see if we can find her.

Not far from the thickly-settled Chinese quarter of the city, but beyond the domains claimed by the yellow inhabitants, stood and stands yet for that matter, a three-story brick house, fair if not prepossessing, exteriorly.

In a certain room on the third floor was a young girl whose figure was faultless in shape, and whose face was beautiful.

The furniture of the room, besides a bed, consisted of several chairs and a small table. The floor was carpeted, and the walls were adorned with several cheap and flashily-framed pictures.

Colonel Tarantula knew where to conduct the prize he had found in the mountains. He was not a stranger to Frisco, though several years had passed since he had last seen the city.

Mountain Moss was the young person whom we have just seen in the third-story room not far from Chinatown.

The railroad had helped Colonel Tarantula and his prize to Frisco, and he had conducted the girl from the depot to her present quarters, which were under the control of a woman who bore a striking resemblance to Nugget Nell, the beauty of Satanscrown.

He knew that this woman would do his bidding, especially when he hinted of a great reward for faithful service. They were not strangers; San Tonquin Maud had drifted to Frisco in the natural course of events; her proper place was among the disreputable characters of the Gold State capital.

Mountain Moss noticed the resemblance between her keeper and Nugget Nell. The woman from San Tonquin, wherever that was, looked a little younger than the Satanscrown beauty, but this did not render the resemblance less striking.

About the time that witnessed the events detailed in the preceding two chapters, Mountain Moss stood at one of the windows that fronted the street, and was looking thoughtfully at the myriads of lights that glimmered in every direction beneath her.

This was Frisco; this was the Aladdin-like city of which she had heard so much. The men

of Trigger Bar had told her a thousand stories about it; Pious Phil had described its beauties and its wealth, and Idaho Ivan; her young friend, had told her of it as he had heard from people whom she had never seen.

The reader will recollect that Golden Gate Kate believed that in childhood she had lived in a vast city. Was this the one?

There were several years of her life which were completely forgotten—blotted out, as it were. Where had she passed them? Was the city life a dream, and had sleep transformed some gold-camp into a brilliant metropolis grander than Frisco?

So absorbed was the girl at the window that she did not hear the door open nor the footsteps behind her.

San Tonquin Maud had glided into the room, and had closed the door softly. Her eyes fell instantly upon the gold heiress, and for several minutes she watched her with an intense eagerness.

Then she glided across the carpet with the noiseless movements of the mountain cat; her hand was suddenly uplifted, and as it fell upon the girl's shoulder her lips pronounced her name.

"Mountain Moss!"

Colonel Tarantula's prisoner turned quickly, and at her first sight of San Tonquin Maud, recoiled with a light cry:

"Heavens! when did you get here from Satanscrown?"

The woman started forward with a sound between a laugh and an exclamation of surprise.

"What is that?—from Satanscrown? Where is that, and for whom do you take me?" she asked. "I am San Tonquin Maud."

"Pardon me," said the girl. "I see my mistake now. I thought—"

"You thought what?" interrupted the woman, and the next moment her fingers encircled the gold-girl's wrist. "Do I look like any person you have seen elsewhere?"

"Yes," said Mountain Moss, speaking mechanically and without the least effort.

"Tell me! You need not fear the disapproval of Colonel Tarantula. I am mistress here. Beyond the walls of this house he may rule or play for a fortune; but here I am power. Who am I like? go on."

"You resemble a woman who is called Nugget Nell."

"At the place you have called Satanscrown?"

"Yes."

"Where and what is it?"

"It is a gold-camp somewhere in Southern Colorado."

"It is a long way off," said the woman speaking aloud, but to herself. "Whose wife is this woman?" she suddenly asked.

"Ruby Rob's, I suppose."

"Not Colonel Tarantula's, eh?"

"No."

"Did you ever see her left wrist?"

It was a strange question, and Mountain Moss saw how the woman's eyes glistened when it was asked.

"I've seen it several times," she said.

"Was there a mark about it—a mark like one that a band of red hot iron would make?"

"She wears a bracelet on that wrist," said Mountain Moss.

"All the time?"

"I think so."

"It is she—at last!" exclaimed San Tonquin Maud. "Ruby Rob's wife now! Who is this new lord she has picked up in Colorado?"

"He is the boss of Satanscrown—the man to whom I really owe my presence here."

"But you came with Colonel Tarantula."

"He stole me from Nugget Nell who was guarding me for Captain Rob. I must be some person who has a history. I am certain of it by this time. Do you know any one to whom a great fortune is to come when found?"

The woman who faced Mountain Moss was silent for a moment.

"Yes; one-half of Frisco knows it," she said.

The young girl went toward her with a startling cry and grasped her arm.

"Tell me who I am, then?" she cried. "What I am to Ruby Rob, or to Colonel Tarantula I do not know, but your answer tells me that you can enlighten me. I have a mark on my shoulder—a strange tattoo, which may make certain my identity. Shall I show it?"

"Yes."

San Tonquin Maud's impatience increased while the mountain girl was baring the shoulder which was tattooed with the device of diamonds.

When the woman caught sight of the tattoo, she leaned forward with a startling cry.

"Merciful heavens! did Colonel Tarantula actually find you?" she exclaimed. "Where have you been all these years?"

"Who am I?" asked the girl, her excitement increasing. "One thing I do know. Colonel Tarantula has no right to keep me here!"

Her eyes flashed and her figure straightened majestically. San Tonquin Maud drew back.

"Why, you're almost worth your weight in diamonds to the man who plays you successfully," she said, cying Mountain Moss. "When you came, I did not know I was receiving such a distinguished guest."

"But that does not answer my question," continued the Golden Gate heiress. "I am some person who has been lost a long time. That is plain to me now. I don't care for what may be coming to me. I'd sooner go back to Trigger Bar—to the rough but true friends I had there, than be a gold princess in Frisco. Are you going to keep me in ignorance about my identity, when I am convinced that you can tell me all?"

"It wouldn't do, my girl," said Maud, with a smile. "I cannot afford to tell you what I am sure of. Let us go back to Satanscrown. You don't know where it is?"

"Ask Colonel Tarantula, the gold gambler," was the reply.

"No insolence!" flashed the girl's keeper, and although Kate involuntarily shrunk from her, her fingers found her wrist again. "Colonel Tarantula, the thief of the chapparal is not here now. This is my kingdom. I have reigned here for years. I can touch a dozen concealed buttons in this house and open as many death pits. I am interested in the woman you called Nugget Nell. There is a mark under the bracelet she wears. It was made by a red-hot iron, and the man who ordered it still lives in Frisco—lives, that is all! You want me to ask Tarantula where Satanscrown is. I believe you can tell me. Look me in the eye and say you cannot if you dare! Where is it? I have a map of Colorado here."

She dropped Kate's hand and went to the little table across the room. Opening a small drawer which the Golden Gate heiress had not discovered, she took out a map with which she came back to the prisoner.

"Now, where is it? Show me Satanscrown," she said madly as she opened the map to Kate's gaze.

"I cannot show you. I do not know," replied Mountain Moss.

A pair of eyes that seemed on fire were suddenly raised to her.

"You mean you will not!" hissed San Tonquin Maud. "You do not want me to find my—this marked woman, I mean. I will force the truth from you, and when Colonel Tarantula returns to his mountain thrush, he may find her less valuable to his schemes than she now is."

Kate comprehended in a moment what was coming; she drew back but not quick enough, for the agile pantheress, San Tonquin Maud, was at the young girl's throat in the drop of an eyelash, and before Kate could lift a hand in self-defense she found herself forced against the window and felt the sash yielding outward!

It was a terrible moment!

The eyes of the keeper of the city den gleamed like the orbs of a tigress. Her desperate hands seemed to meet in the girl's throat, and her cry of horror when she heard the sash crack was choked down.

"Won't tell me where I can find the branded woman?" hissed Maud. "I will choke your life out and make you valueless to the chapparal thief! I am a tigress born and bred. Colonel Tarantula doesn't know who I am although he probably knows Nugget Nell's identity. What will you do? Will you open your mouth and tell me, or shall I push you through the window to the stones below?"

Golden Gate Kate heard these words but could not reply for the hands under her chin. She was helpless in the clutches of a woman who seemed to possess the strength of a maniac.

"Won't tell, eh? Then down you go!"

It surely was not San Tonquin Maud's intention to carry out her terrible threat. It was made for the purpose of intimidating the girl, but her anger got the upper hand.

Mountain Moss felt herself pressed harder than ever against the half rotten sash as the fury before her spoke last.

The glass broke, the frame that held them yielded, and all at once a wild cry pealed from the woman's throat.

The body of the young girl was more than half out of the window. She was a weight which San Tonquin Maud could not hold!

Mountain Moss threw out her hands to clutch something. They closed only on air! It was the most terrible moment of her life.

All at once the hands of the mad woman left her throat. San Tonquin Maud had to save herself, for the weight of the bonanza girl was dragging her from the window.

"My God! I am doomed!" cried Mountain Moss.

Suddenly she felt herself fall backward, and the next instant she was shooting down—down—down!

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE DARK.

"I WOULDN'T swap 'hands' with you for ten thousand to boot. You may think you have me, Colorado Carlos, but we will wait an' see who rakes in the stakes at the end of the game. I can't say that I've ever been in a tighter place than this, but I'm not at all alarmed about the unpleasant situation of this one. Colonel Tarantula has always been able heretofore to take care of himself."

Thus muttered the little man whom we left in a previous chapter walking away watched like

a hawk by the eccentric man known as Colorado Carlos.

The two men had left the Hotel Occidental behind, and as they went down the street not one of the many people who noticed them thought that one was the captive of the other.

We remember, as we return to them, that the mountain Ishmaelite had told Colonel Tarantula in plain language that if he showed any signs of treachery his life would immediately pay the forfeit, no matter where he was at the time, and the manner in which the words were spoken lent a stern emphasis to their potency.

Colonel Tarantula, plotting all the time, led his captor down several streets before he turned abruptly toward the Chinese quarters. Colorado Carlos saw the change at once, but he did not speak of it at the time.

"Is the girl in this part of the city?" he asked at last, eying the colonel sternly.

"Don't suppose I'd guide you wrong, eh?" was the reply, and waiting not for the Ishmaelite to reply, Colonel Tarantula looked straight ahead and kept on.

Three minutes later the two were in the heart of Chinatown, and everywhere were seen the Mongolian citizens of Frisco.

"This man is playing a game at a risk," said Colorado Carlos, looking down upon the person at his side. "He is planning now to serve me a trick. I can see the scheme in his eye; he can't conceal it, to save his soul."

The big sport, however, did not speak his suspicions but let the cool Texan lead him on.

At length a narrow street almost as dark as an alley opened before the twain. Colonel Tarantula was about to plunge in when the hand of Colorado Carlos fell lightly upon his shoulder.

"See here! Must we go through this street?" he said.

"It is my way to the girl," answered the colonel, with a smile. "Ar' ye afraid, Colorado?"

The bold eyes of the Colorado sport answered that question.

"No," he said. "Come on!"

With a gleam of victory in his eyes, Colonel Tarantula started forward and the moment he entered the darkness the click of a revolver assailed his ears.

"It is at your head, colonel," said the voice of Colorado Carlos, and the word "it" was explained by the cold muzzle of the unseen weapon as it touched the Texan's head just over the right ear.

All this time Pious Phil and Idaho Ivan who had followed the couple from the hotel had not lost sight of them, but now the gloom of the dark street swallowed them up as effectually as if they had gone into a cavern.

"Shall we follow?" whispered the boy, looking up into the face of the lean alcalde.

"No; there is another way through. When I frequented Chinatown I knew it like a book, an' I guess I hev'n't forgot a single leaf. We kin beat 'em to the other street. Follow me."

Pious Phil turned away with the boy at his heels and entered a saloon kept by a Chinaman who stared at the alcalde a moment, and came forward with a grin.

"Not now, Hong Fo," said Pious Phil. "You've got a memory like a fox. I don't want ter see you now. Thar's other work on my hands."

"Melican Phil dlinkee with Hong Fo, anyhow."

"No rot-gut—thanks!" and the lean alcalde, crossed the room thick with smoke and half-filled with the worst part of Chinatown. "I want the old way," he added, in a whisper to Hong Fo. "I haven't used it for years, but it is thar yet, I know."

"Way shut up. 'Melican police finddee outee."

"We'll see. Come, Idaho. These yellow dogs lie in their sleep."

Pious Phil opened a door in the rear of the bar and sprang into a poorly lighted hallway.

"Chinatown is undermined," he went on, speaking rapidly. "I'll show you one of the underground avenues. Here we are!"

He caught hold of a ring in the floor and pulled upward revealing a door and a flight of steps.

"Go down," he said to the boy.

Idaho Ivan obeyed; Pious Phil descended after him and shut the trap.

"Give me yer hand! Ah! hyer it is!" he went on, and the next moment the boy was jerked forward and was running rapidly down a dark corridor in which he could not see his hand before his face.

"If we bring up suddenly against a wall there will be a catastrophe," he laughed.

If he had seen the hand that the lean alcalde kept in advance, he might have left his words unspoken.

After the run of a minute Pious Phil came to a sudden stop.

"I hear voices," said the boy.

"Of course you do. We will go up an' see the talkers."

The Alcalde of Trigger Bar found a flight of steps in the darkness, and a moment later by opening a trap-door similar to the one in Hong Fo's little back room, the two had emerged from the darkness of the underground retreat.

"We have beaten Colorado and the colonel through the street," said Pious Phil, with confidence, when they had passed through a saloon to the sidewalk. "We will wait here till they show up, an' then play ferret ag'in. I rather like trackin', Idaho, but I'd sooner foller a trail in ther mountains."

The two pards stood within a few feet of the mouth of the narrow thoroughfare, and began to wait for the two men whom they had seen enter it on the other side.

All at once a man came out.

"Look!" exclaimed Idaho Ivan. "Two went in, one came out."

The man who had emerged from the street was not Colorado Carlos. His build showed this, neither did he look like Colonel Tarantula. He was barely visible in the poor light that fell at the mouth of the narrow way.

Pious Phil leaned anxiously forward; so did the boy.

"Heavens!" ejaculated the latter. "It is Colonel Tarantula, by all that's holy! Where is Colorado Carlos?"

At the same moment Pious Phil seemed to have made a like discovery.

"They hev parted," the mountain boy heard him say. "The colonel worked one o' his chaparral games in the dark!"

The Alcalde of Trigger Bar went forward as the last word was spoken. His hand was at the butt of a revolver, and Idaho Ivan's keen ears heard a slight click.

The man called Colonel Tarantula turned toward the lean alcalde before he had approached him by three steps. He appeared to have caught his tread, which was almost noiseless.

"Halt! I've had foxes enough at my heels for one night!" flashed the Texan, and up went two revolvers as Pious Phil partly lifted his weapon, but stopped within a few feet of the mountain Ishmaelite's late companion.

Idaho Ivan stood spellbound at this thrilling tableau.

"About face!" commanded Colonel Tarantula. "I have killed a dozen men for following me a less distance than you have, Pious Phil. You have tracked me from the gold-camps, an' I am to be shadowed through Frisco because you make my game yours. You did bring Colorado Carlos back ter life when Topaz Tom had dropped him on sight at Trigger Bar. Turn, an' follow me no more! It is death to dog the footsteps of the chaparral king in the capital of the gold-coast. Now, my Colorado sleuth, about face!"

Pious Phil saw the leveled weapon over which these stern words came like notes of doom.

"This man is as quick as a cat, an' as merciless as an Apache," he said to himself. "We will hev another chance at him if we let him go now."

He turned his back to the cool Texan, but reluctantly; his lips were glued together, and there was a flash in his eye.

All at once one of Colonel Tarantula's revolvers dropped, and the next moment a loud report rung down the street.

Pious Phil tottered against the nearest building, but quickly recovered, and turned half-way round. Idaho Ivan darted forward, an exclamation of horror on his lips.

"I am here, Texan coward!" he cried. "The game you play can never win while I hold a hand!"

The lean alcalde lifted his revolver at that moment and blazed away. It was the shot of a man half-stunned, and had no effect.

In a moment Colonel Tarantula had disappeared. It was doubtful whether he had heard the boy.

"It war what we call a flesh shot, Idaho," said the alcalde, showing the excited youth a bleeding furrow above his right ear. "I don't like 'em thet close, but I take 'em as they come. Thet man war ther colonel, sure enough. We'll see what kind o' game he played in ther dark."

Already Pious Phil seemed himself again. He picked up the hat that had been knocked off by the Texan's bullet, and turned toward the dark street.

"Colorado is somewhar in hyar," he said to Ivan. "I don't see how ther colonel could git away if he war Colorado's prisoner."

"He went off alone, at any rate, and the game for the Lossing millions has taken a new lease."

The two pards were in the little street which they had lately avoided by taking to the subterranean passageway under the Chinese saloons.

Suddenly Pious Phil stopped and drew back with an expression that alarmed the young miner.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Colorado Carlos," was the startling response. Idaho Ivan knew that his companion had gone forward, and was stooping over some object of discovery.

"Here is whar the colonel played his hand," he went on in a low voice as the boy got down beside him, and then a match flashed up.

A moment later a startling cry parted the miner's lips, for stretched at full length on his back across the narrow street lay the magnificent figure of Colorado Carlos!

The huge arms were outstretched, and near

one lay a revolver, which, beyond doubt, it had lately grasped. Idaho Ivan, struck speechless by the spectacle, could only stare at the mountain king.

"Boy, you've heard ov ther weazel turnin' on ther eagle in mid-air, heven't yer?" suddenly asked Pious Phil, with a strange smile at the corners of his mouth. "Wal, this ar' a case ov thet sort. Ther Texan weazel war too much for ther Colorado eagle."

The match was burning brilliantly now, and Idaho Ivan could see the handsome features of the mountain Ishmaelite.

"Tell me that this magnificent fellow isn't dead, Phil," he said, laying his hand on Colorado's pulse.

"I'd like ter do nothin' better in ther world, but I can't," was the answer. "Hyar is ther iron-handled dagger that did ther work. This is ther Texan weazel's tooth."

Idaho Ivan looked once at the weapon of death and sprang up.

"All this is for Kate's inheritance," he exclaimed. "By heavens! Colonel Tarantula shall never win the game!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO THUNDERBOLTS.

"WHAT is your report, Agate? Have we lost the trail in Frisco?"

"It looks that way, cap'n. The game came hyer, thar's no doubt about that. I have seen Colorado Carlos, an' Pious Phil, an' ther boy."

"What boy? not—"

"Yes, ther youngster we thought fell into the cabin pit from Topaz Tom's hands when ther mountain Ishmaelite dropped him in Satans-crown. Some-how-or-other ther boy escaped."

Ruby Rob was silent. He could not contrive by what means Idaho Ivan had escaped the fate to which he had been condemned; but it was no time to think about it in San Francisco. It was enough to hear Agate Alf say that the young miner was in the city, and the discovery told him that he and Pious Phil were hunting the Golden Gate heiress.

Captain Rob and his last pards, Onyx Oil and Agate Alf, occupied a small room in one of the numerous second-class hotels of the city. It was the night after Colonel Tarantula's adventure with Colorado Carlos.

The three Jewels had come together for consultation. They had failed to find Mountain Moss, but the failure had not discouraged them.

With three and a quarter millions at stake, they were not going to quit the trail. They had found the gold girl once, had even had her in their clutches, but the cunning and coolness of the man who called himself Colonel Tarantula had baffled them after an almost ceaseless hunt of eight years.

They did not know that Colorado Carlos had fallen beneath the dagger of the man he had captured. Nobody had seen the play in the dark. Colonel Tarantula had drawn a blade which he carried along his leg, and, with the quickness of the cat, had turned upon his enemy, even when that enemy was holding a cocked revolver within an inch of his head!

"What do you say ter a play without the girl?" suddenly suggested Onyx Oil in the room in which we found the three pards at the head of the present chapter.

"Fudge! what kind of a play would that be?" exclaimed Ruby Rob. "Without Kate we lose the whole sum. The girl must be found! Remember that we hev'n't been long in Frisco. I can't say that we hev the hang o' the work hyer yet. We hev seen Colonel Tarantula only to lose him in Chinatown. What is yer play, Onyx?"

"It war a scheme for tappin' ther bank beforehand," was the reply. "Thar ar' three an' a quarter millions for ther girl when produced."

"Yes."

"I get a kick at Leroy La Croix ther head trustee ter day. I studied him well until I discovered in him a man I used ter know in ther San Juan kentry when he war'n't worth a dollar."

"Can that be?" exclaimed Ruby Rob. "Thet man is a golden nabob hyer now."

"I don't care what he is," said Onyx Oil, with emphasis. "I reckon I haven't forgotten Gold Gaston. Thar is French blood in his veins, hence his present name, Leroy La Croix, for he cannot conceal his frog-eating ancestry. Know that man? If I war ter walk into his bank an' say, 'Hello Gold Gaston!' he'd jump out o' his clothes in spite o' his collar. I'd like ter do it, too; hang me for a Greaser if I wouldn't."

"But your scheme?" said Captain Rob, eagerly.

"What is it, Onyx?"

"Simply this. I walk into La Croix's presence an' say: 'What'll you give me if I don't fetch Golden Gate Kate foran't? That will take his breath ov course, an' then he may laugh in my face.'"

"That is just what he will do, an' you will be lucky if you ar' not put out," smiled Agate Alf.

"It'll never come ter thet," grinned Onyx Oil. "If he laughs at me I'll lean for'ard an' say, 'This is bizness, Gold Gaston.' He won't hev a particle ov color arter thet harmless remark. I know that man. Gold Gaston is changed only

in name. He was rightly named years ago in the San Juan kentry. He worships money now as he did then, when he hadn't much ter worship. I'll bet my head that he wouldn't hev ther girl turn up now for a cool million."

Ruby Rob heard his pard through and shook his head.

"It won't work," he said. "We will try ther trail a while longer. This nabob may be Gold Gaston, as you say, but he may be shrewd enough to ask you to prove that you can produce Kate Lossing. You have no past act of his to hold over his head."

"I hev'n't, eh?" ejaculated Onyx Oil. "Let me penetrate to your trustee's private office an' show you."

"There is a difference between Frisco an' the San Juan country," was the reply. "Some crimes are outlawed."

"Is that one that made your brother a driveling idiot outlawed?"

"By the eternal, no!" cried Ruby Rob, flushing to the temples. "That is one of the crimes that time cannot outlaw."

"Have you seen him since your return to Frisco?"

"I have not. I dare not look at him while we have this gold-game on our hands. One glimpse would send me from the city to Santa Fe, where I lost the trail of the viperess who committed the deed. Don't mention him any more, Onyx. I want to find Colonel Tarantula and the pearl he took from Satanscrown. After that, with a million apiece, we will separate satisfied."

Captain Rob went to the window when he had finished, and called the two pards to his side.

"Look yonder!" he said, pointing across the street. "In Heaven's name, what fetched that woman to Frisco?"

"It is Nugget Nell!" exclaimed Agate Alf. "She told me once that a million wouldn't tempt her hyer."

"She has told me the same a hundred times," said Ruby Rob, eying the woman whom he had discovered. "She awoke from the deep, almost deadly, sleep into which Colonel Tarantula threw her when he robbed us of the bonanza girl. She has come to the city she hates."

"Mebbe she has heard of the marryin' clause in the major's will," responded Onyx Oil with a smile, "an' she may think that you will marry Mountain Moss, in order ter get ther hull bonanza at once."

Ruby Rob's lips met, and the eyes that were watching the woman were seen to emit a fiery flash.

"She had better not think that!" he said. "If she interferes in our game hyer she will wish she had slept on in Satanscrown. Ah! ther she goes."

"Shall I follow?" asked Agate Alf.

"Yes; don't let her get out o' your sight. She has ruled in Satanscrown; she cannot rule hyer. Track her down. She must have a stopping-place. I recollect that she was once a queen in Frisco. It was when I first met her, after she had discarded Colonel Tarantula."

Agate Alf was gone before Ruby Rob had ceased to speak, and Onyx Oil and his chief were the only occupants of the little room.

"Onyx, if thar is no other way, we will carry out the clause you have mentioned," said Captain Rob. "I can make the girl my wife immediately after she has been found."

"But Nugget Nell?"

"She will not interfere."

"You can't buy her off."

"Mebbe not, but we can get rid of her," was the significant answer. "When Agate tracks her down she will be safe. I know her old haunts, but I don't think she'll go to them. Why did she fear to come back to Frisco?"

"You wouldn't believe if I told you, captain," said Onyx Oil, looking into Ruby Rob's face.

"What do you know?" and the boss of Satanscrown leaned forward with eagerness filling his eyes. "Is it possible, Onyx, that you have kept some secret connected with the camp's Cleopatra from me? I thought we were pards."

"So we ar', captain; but I hadn't the heart ter turn on the woman who nursed me when I war carried inter camp after ther big mining accident."

"But you must tell me now. I have seen the time when I would have waded through blood to my waist for Nugget Nell. I saved her from a New Mexican mob in San Jose, but she must not interfere with me if I see proper to make Kate my wife in order to get all the bonanza at once. But your secret, Onyx? What do you know about the Mistress ov ther Roll?"

Onyx Oil stood straight and silent before the boss of Satanscrown. A mental battle was being fought, and Captain Rob saw it.

Suddenly he sprang forward half-tigerishly and clutched Onyx Oil's arm, as he exclaimed:

"Is it about my brother?"

The eyes of the two men met at that moment.

"It is! Great God! I see it by your eyes, Onyx!" cried the bonanza sport. "You need not speak. The woman I have loved at last turns out to be Viper Bess—the person who, here in this city as my brother's wife, administered a subtle poison an' deprived him of his

reason. You look all I say, Onyx Oil. Your eyes confirm my terrible discovery. You have known this a long time, perhaps for years; you have seen me make love to this viperess in Satanscrown, and yet you would not speak. I am said to be the hardest wretch left unhung by the Vigilantes of Southern Colorado, but one thing I have not lost—love for my worse than murdered brother. I have not forgotten the oath taken to avenge him. Remember that I had never seen Nugget Nell till I saved her life at San Jose. She was Nugget Nell then. If I had known that she was Viper Bess, I, and not that howlin' mob of Greasers, would have torn her to pieces! Whar is she now? Ah! I know why she feared ter come back ter Frisco. Her victim is here. Colonel Tarantula knew her, for he threatened ter drag her back. Agate Alf is on her track, but he might miss her. If she should discover him, she will give him the slip. I would have given you a thousand if you had told me this before."

"I couldn't, after ther way she nursed me."

"She did it ter keep me in her fatal snare!" cried Captain Rob. "I am tempted to let the gold-trail go for the present. I now know where Viper Bess is. Show me this woman again, an' I'll make her Queen of Tartarus!"

Half an hour later the little room was entirely deserted, and the two men had disappeared among the throngs of people on the street.

Not long afterward a man walked up to the door of a magnificent house on Nob Hill and jerked the bell.

In a moment the door was opened, and he was met by a servant who asked him for his card.

"I don't carry any such flub-dubs. I'm from down-town just at present, an' have bizness with Leroy La Croix who lives hyer."

The San Francisco banker, who stood in the middle of a splendid room, heard these words.

"Admit the gentleman, George," he said to the hesitating servant, and the next moment Onyx Oil, who was the caller, tramped into the parlor.

"I'll try my scheme just for luck," he said to himself. "I'll see whether Gold Gaston, alias La Croix remembers one o' his old pards o' Catfish Camp."

As Onyx Oil advanced toward the banker, he was scrutinized from head to foot. If he had looked over La Croix's shoulders he would have seen a door slightly ajar.

The Californian started visibly as if Onyx Oil was not the person looked for, and he drew back when the Satanscrown sport extended his hand.

"I don't know you, sir," said La Croix, haughtily.

"Oh, yer don't, eh? When did yer memory git poor?" laughed Onyx Oil. "Thar war a time when you warn't ashamed ter call me yer pard."

"You? That time has never been!"

"You never saw Catfish Camp, hey? Look hyer, Gold Gaston, what'll you give if I don't produce Kate Lossing, yer lost ward? Thar's millions in this game yer playin' just now, an' nobody knows it better than Bedrock Burt, yer old pard o' Catfish Camp."

The face of the Frisco millionaire, which grew red and white by turns while Onyx Oil spoke, was colorless when he stopped.

La Croix stepped back a pace and stamped on the floor.

The next moment the door behind him flew open and two men stepped into the room. Onyx Oil stepped back and his right hand flew toward his weapon, but he was already covered by four large revolvers, and the eyes behind the shining barrels seemed to be waiting for a signal by the gold nabob.

"We weren't looking for you," said La Croix, addressing the astonished sport. "I expected a visit from a person who is playing a game similar to yours. These gentlemen are detectives in my employ. You call yourself Bedrock Burt and claim that you have known me at a place called Catfish Camp. I wish to say that that is all false. You cannot prove a word you have said. This is the plainest attempt to blackmail I have ever seen. Gentlemen," to the detectives, "you will take charge of that rascal. I will confront him when needed."

"Mebbe you'd better not," hissed Onyx Oil.

"Take him away!" thundered La Croix. "This is the coolest piece of impudence I ever saw. Catfish Camp? I never heard of the infamous place!"

The sport was given no time for reply; two hands clutched him, and he was hustled away.

"Great God!" ejaculated the banker. "Who will come next?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FORTUNE AND FATE.

AT eleven o'clock that same night, Agate Alf came back to the hotel at which he, with Captain Rob and Onyx Oil had put up on their arrival in San Francisco. The Satanscrown sport, as we know, had been ordered to follow Nugget Nell by his chief and the fellow was ready with his report.

He had tracked the camp Cleopatra to a cer-

tain place where he believed she had established herself for the present, but he had made another discovery which he thought far more startling than this.

Ruby Rob was not waiting for him and Agate Alf waited in the room till he grew impatient. He was about to leave when a boy came to the door which was ajar and looked in.

"Are you Captain Coldgrip?" the little fellow asked when he caught sight of Agate Alf.

Captain Coldgrip was the name by which Ruby Rob was known to the hotel officials.

"Yes, I'm ther cap'n," said the sport, for at that moment he caught sight of a paper in the boy's hand.

"Here's su'thin' for yer, then. I got it from a man who's been chucked inter ther station."

"Jehul!" exclaimed Agate Alf, snatching the note from the urchin's hands, and while the young messenger was moving away he read it as follows:

"CAPTAIN ROB:—At ther station charged with attempted blackmail! Arrested at Leroy La Croix's house. Come! Boy will show you. Onyx."

"The fool tried to carry out his pet scheme an' got taken in!" exclaimed Agate Alf looking up. "Ef it warn't fer ther fact that we might need him, I'd let 'im stay thar. 'Boy will show you.' Hello! whar is ther boy?"

A moment later Agate Alf was on the floor below looking for the boy who had delivered the note.

The little fellow was gone.

"Mebbe he couldn't read, or didn't understand Onyx's instructions," he said to himself. "Have I got ter make a tour ov ther police stations ov Frisco ter find Onyx Oil? I won't do it!"

At that moment a man was watching Agate Alf from the darkest corner of the little "office." He had seen him from the moment of his entrance, and it was evident that he was taking considerable interest in him.

The task of searching the various stations for Onyx Oil who had gotten into trouble by an indiscreet play of his own, was too much for the Satanscrown sport. He resolved to wait till Ruby Rob showed up, an event which was liable to take place at any time.

"If Captain Rob knew of my unexpected discovery he would be hyer ter listen," continued the sport to himself. "One of our worst foes is forever out of our way. The man lyin' at ther morgue with a bloody dagger hangin' above him is Colorado Carlos, an' thar's no doubt that Colonel Tarantula gave him his passports ter eternity. I couldn't exactly swear ter this, if I war called on, but I've got it settled in my own mind ter ther effect. Good-by, Colorado. You gave us a good deal of bother in Satanscrown, but ther colonel war too much for yer in Frisco. Why don't ther cap'n come back? I b'lieve I'll drink over my ghostly find."

He walked into the little bar-room attached to the hotel and ordered a drink for all when a voice at his elbow said:

"I don't keer if I do, Agate."

The Colorado sport turned as if a pistol had clicked at his ear and the next moment he burst into a laugh.

"You hyer, Cuban Con? By Jericho! why didn't you stay in camp an' reclaim yer ranch when ther colonel left it?"

The man who had spoken was the Spanish blooded whisky-seller of Satanscrown, and the person who had been forced to sell out to Colonel Tarantula an event fully chronicled in the course of our story.

"I drifted ter Frisco," replied Cuban Con, "but yer' the last galoot I expected ter see hyer. Ruby Rob's hyer too, en?"

"Yes, all thet's left ov us ar' hyer," said Agate Alf.

"So is the bonanza girl!"

Agate Alf gave a start that was noticed by Cuban Con. The eyes of the big sport assumed an eager look.

"N—no, I guess not," he said carelessly.

Now, Agate Alf would have given his last dollar to have found Golden Gate Kate at that moment.

The bait seemed to take.

"What would you give for the girl?" asked Cuban Con.

"What girl yer talkin' about?"

"The Golden Gate heiress. Come, Agate, you're no fool; you know all about the lost child of the army major who was killed on the Overland trail some years ago. I know nothing about how ter proceed ter get ther cards stocked right in a game ov this kind. I have found the girl."

The glass encircled by Agate Alf's hand almost dropped to the floor.

Cuban Con spoke with an emphasis that carried conviction to the heart of his listener.

"What do you know?" he asked. "Tell me that first, an' I will then tell you what ther information is worth."

"I was in a certain faro-bank last night betting my last eagles," said the ranch-keeper. "All at once there was a loud cry outside an' somebody came in an' said that a young girl had fallen from the third story window of the very building I was in. As I had lost my last dollar at that very moment, I got up an' went out. The report was true, but instead of a dead girl,

as I expected to find, I discovered that her fall had been broken by an awning, an' thet she was taken up unconscious an' badly bruised. Curiosity led me to follow the three persons who had picked her up. I overtook them an' got a look at the girl's face. Jehu! it was the image of a face I once saw at Trigger Bar, but its owner wore a boy's clothes. After that I kept along-side. I saw the girl carried into a drug-store about a square from the faro-bank. There she recovered consciousness, an' there I became certain that she was the Golden Gate heiress."

"What settled your belief?" asked Agate Alf, who had been breathlessly interested in Cuban Con's narrative from the first.

"I found a small tattoo—a dence of diamonds on her shoulder. It was the same except in size as the mark found over the heart of the tongueless man killed that night in Satanscrown. I guess that tattoo proves her identity, eh, Agate?"

The Satanscrown sport could hardly reply.

Here was a stroke of fortune entirely unlooked for. Chance had come to the rescue where shrewdness had failed.

"Where is this girl?" asked Agate Alf, with burning eagerness.

"Where I left her," was the sharp reply.

"Cuban Con must be played with," said the Satanscrown sport to himself. "Mountain Moss must be found at all hazards. The gold bonanza is in my grip again."

"I am willing ter play fair with you, Agate," said Cuban Con at this juncture. "I have caught on ter a few things since I went ter Satanscrown, an' you kin bet that I've heard ov ther Lossing millions which b'long ter a sartin young girl who had a tattoo mark put on her shoulder when she war a little more than a baby. But you've got ther hull lay-out ov ther game; and Captain Rob who has been on this trail for eight or nine years knows just how ter git ther big stake if he only had ther girl. I'll divide."

This was the proposition waited for by Agate Alf.

"Done!" he exclaimed. "Thar shall be a fair divide. By Jupiter! Cuban Con, with your share you will be able ter break every bank in Frisco."

"That's what I want ter do. Ef I hev been absent from Frisco for several years thar's some places hyer whose doors ar' open ter me. It war ther luckiest event ov my life thet I war losin' my pile when thet gold-mine dropped from ther third story window. I had her taken inter ther house ov my sister."

"Yer sister?" echoed Agate Alf and there was an incredulous smile at the corners of his mouth.

"My sister Anita," said Con coolly. "The men who carried her thar did not see ther tattoo on the girl's shoulder."

"Good!" exclaimed Agate Alf.

"When did you leave Mountain Moss last?"

"Late this afternoon."

"How war she then?"

"Conscious, but pretty badly hurt," was the reply. "She's got an idea that she is worth many times her weight in gold—"

"Jehu! she must not get away from your sister."

"She can't do that."

"It is singular that nobody who inhabits the house from which she fell has hunted for her."

"She was deliberately pushed from the window by a woman called San Tonquin Maud—Colonel Tarantula's friend, an' the woman to whom he intrusted the girl. She will not hunt for her."

"I would like to see the Golden Gate 'find,'" said Agate Alf looking into Cuban Con's eyes. "By Jove! Con, you come inter ther play just when we need a new trump."

The ex-whisky-seller of Satanscrown laughed till his little eyes glittered like a serpent's.

"We will go an' see our livin' gold-mine," he said hilariously. "Anita has her orders to admit nobody. She will obey orders. You kin bet yer boots, Agate, that Mountain Moss ar' jest whar I left her!"

A minute later the two men passed from the hotel, triumph in the eyes of each. Agate Alf had forgotten all about Onyx Oil languishing at the unknown station, and he was so eager to reach Golden Gate Kate, that he left no note for Ruby Rob explaining in any manner his absence.

Cuban Con showed by his route and by frequent short cuts, that he was well acquainted with San Francisco, despite his sojourn among the distant mines. Strange to say, he led Agate Alf into Chinatown, and through the famous dark little street where but a few hours before Colonel Tarantula had turned on the man who had "cornered" him.

At last Cuban Con dodged into another little street and ran up three steps before the door of a darkened and plain-looking brick house.

The door had no bell, therefore the little Spanish-blooded sport was obliged to knock. There was no response.

"Anita is asleep," said Agate Alf. "By Jerusalem! Cuban, your dragon has shut her eyes ag'in' orders."

"It is not that," said Cuban Con, biting his

lips, and he rapped again, but with the same result.

"Follow me! I know another trail," exclaimed the Cuban, and springing from the step he darted into the alley that ran along the side of the house. Agate Alf, eager but half fearful, was at his heels.

In the rear of the house the two men found a high, close fence, which Cuban Con scaled with the agility of a cat, and the pair dropped to the ground on the other side.

The next moment Cuban Con was at the back door. He did not stop to knock, but threw his weight against it and pushed it open.

Agate Alf struck a match and drew a revolver.

Cuban Con was already gone; he had reached a room beyond the one just entered, and as Agate Alf crossed the threshold with a flaring match, he heard him exclaim:

"Thank fortune, Agate! Ther gold bonanza is hyer yet!"

The following instant Agate Alf saw the outlines of a bed, and then he noticed a figure lying upon it.

"Whar is Anita?" he asked.

"Hang me! if I know, but what do we care so we have ther livin' placer safe?"

Cuban Con's laugh was full of triumph and sounded strangely in that room.

"Is this Mountain Moss?" And Agate Alf held the dying match over the face among the pillows. "No! by ther eternal heavens! this must be thet sister ov yours!"

A wild cry welled from Cuban Con's throat. He was at the bed in a second, but the match had expired!

"Another match! quick!" he exclaimed.

Agate Alf bunched four and struck them all at once. The light springing up made a little torch, and illuminated the whole room.

"Hades an' horns! it is Anita, sure enough!" cried Cuban Con after one look. "An' choked ter death, too!"

The picture that Agate Alf saw was horrible enough. The woman on the bed was black in the face.

The two sports stared at her in silence for several minutes.

"Ther girl didn't do this!" said Cuban Con at last.

"No!" was the quick reply. "This ar' ther work ov Colonel Tarantula."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HANDS UP" IN FRISCO.

"WAL, you found her hiding-place ov course? I have been waiting for your report."

Agate Alf was back in the little room in the second-class hotel, and the man who confronted him was Captain Rob.

"I found whar Nugget Nell puts up at, but thet ain't all ther news I've got," said the sport, when he caught his breath.

"Give me that first."

He complied with the command, and then went on to detail his singular adventure with Cuban Con.

Ruby Rob heard his man through with strange interest; at the climax he almost sprung from his chair.

"Anita strangled, and Kate taken away?" he exclaimed. "Of course that is Colonel Tarantula's work. We must find the trail at once. Onyx Oil should be hyer now."

"He's specially detained elsewhere," said Agate Alf with a smile. "Onyx was arrested at Leroy La Croix's house for attempted blackmail, an' ther station-house holds him at this moment."

An oath flew from Ruby Rob's mouth.

"The fool! he had to play the game he suggested. In the station-house, eh? Which one?"

"I don't know."

"Let him reflect over his foolishness till morning! You an' I must go on with the game, Agate. The murder of Anita will be discovered an' the detectives of Frisco will try their hands on it."

"Ther's not much danger ov thet, cap'n. I thought o' thet afore I left ther house, an' Cuban Con agreed ter give no alarm till he heard from you."

"By Jupiter! that was a stroke of policy on your part, Agate," exclaimed Captain Rob. "If the detectives were to find Kate, the whole game might end in smoke after all. She fell from the window of the room where I had left her in the care of San Tonquin Maud, a woman whom I thought I could trust. I don't know what happened to cause the fall, for when I went there last night, the window was broken, an' Kate an' Maud war gone! Maud is Nugget Nell's half-sister, an' hates her like wildfire."

Agate Alf started slightly at this revelation.

"She has been hunting for our queen of Satanscrown for years," continued Ruby Rob. "If she had remained till now I would have set her on Nell's track. But we want to find Colonel Tarantula. He is the person who found Kate an' took her from Anita who, by the way, is really Cuban Con's sister. You may be sure, Agate, that she did not surrender the gold girl without a struggle."

"The room shows that she did not," said Agate Alf. "If Colonel Tarantula should take

a notion ter take Kate straight ter La Croix, ther nabob banker—"

"He won't do that," cried Ruby Rob. "He will play fast now for the million stakes, an' it will be a cool hand at that."

"What is ter be done?"

Agate Alf began to show signs of despair.

He might have looked backward at that moment and seen the result of the hunt for the bonanza girl.

Jasper John had been shot dead between Trigger Bar and Tartarus Gulch by a man now supposed to be Pious Phil. Topaz Tom had fallen before Colorado Carlos's revolver, and Gold-dust James, the recruit who had stepped into Diamond Dave's shoes, had met his fate at Colonel Tarantula's hands!

Onyx Oil was in anything but a desirable situation, and he (Agate Alf) and Captain Rob were the only ones left of the six Jewels of Satanscrown. It was true that Colorado Carlos was dead at last; but Colonel Tarantula was in San Francisco playing a bold and seemingly successful hand for the three and a quarter millions.

Then, to crown all this, Pious Phil and Idaho Ivan were not far away, and Nugget Nell, a desperate though beautiful woman, had come to the scene of her great crime for a purpose as yet unknown.

All this flitted through Agate Alf's mind in a minute, as it were. The outlook was almost enough to make him recoil from the trail. He even wished that he had deserted like Diamond Dave whose whereabouts were unknown.

"If we could get our hands on Gold Kate ag'in we'd rake in ther big stakes," said the mountain sport to himself. "But how ar' we goin' ter git her when she ar' in Colonel Tarantula's hands?"

Captain Rob seemed to read the desperado's thoughts at that very moment.

"Come! to work!" he exclaimed. "I have played some desperate games in my life, an' some were worse than this one."

"I don't know whar they war," ejaculated Agate Alf.

"One was in New Mexico against the same man we are fighting now. He was Major Mossback then, but now, as Colonel Tarantula, we shall beat him. You will show me the house where Kate was."

The two men left the hotel, and did not stop till Agate Alf had shown Ruby Rob the place where he and Cuban Con had made the startling discoveries already narrated.

Two hours later Ruby Rob, with the shrewdness of a city detective, had cornered a certain hack-driver who was inclined to be stubborn.

"You were hired to-night by a smallish-like man with a thin face an' a brown beard?" said Captain Rob, eying the hackman closely.

The pair were seated in a small room in the rear of a saloon, and were the only occupants of the place.

"I never take photographs of my customers," said the hackman.

"Oh, you don't, eh?" grated the mountain tough. "You could not help noticing this man. You drove him to a certain house, he went in and brought out a young lady. What he did he tell you?"

The hackman drew back and threw a quick glance toward the door; Ruby Rob caught it instantly.

"You don't want to play the dumb game here," he said savagely, and his bronze hand leaping across the table, closed on the man's wrist. "I am just from where human life has no value. You will tell me about this man who employed you to-night. If you do not, by the eternal heavens! I will leave you here dead!"

Words like these the thunderstruck driver had never heard before, and with the last one, a revolver came up over the edge of the beer-table and stared him in the face.

"Go on! What did this man tell you about the woman he brought from the house?"

"He said she was his sister."

"Aha! that is the game, eh?" laughed Ruby Rob. "Did she walk out?"

"No, he carried her. She seemed to be asleep."

"Well, you took them where?"

"To California street."

"A long drive," said Ruby Rob, but half aloud.

The hackman nodded.

"You haven't been back long?"

"Not very."

"We'll go ter California street again."

"I'd rather not."

"Of course, but we'll go thar all the same. You know the house? Don't say no, for you do."

"Yes, I can find the place," said the hackman, submissively.

"You don't want to play me false," were the sport's next words, and his fingers released the man's wrist. "You want to take me to the house to which you drove Colonel Tarantula—"

"Is that his name?" asked the hackman, as the mountain sport stopped abruptly.

"What if it is?" he asked. "Have you never heard it before?"

"I have."

"When an' whar?"

"I drove a woman last night—I took her to

the depot, an' she talked to herself in the hack."

"Ah! what did she say?"

"Among other things, she said that the girl was dead, an' that Colonel Tarantula would lose three millions by her death. She was leaving the city to find some woman who was somewhere in Colorado."

"It was San Tonquin Maud!" exclaimed Ruby Rob. "She has gone to hunt Nugget Nell. The fool! if she had hunted nearer home she might have found her. Let her go. Now, sir, we go to California street. Come!"

The pair left the room and passed through the saloon to the sidewalk. The hack tightly closed stood a few feet away cast in shadow and ready for use.

"Remember! you play me no false hand," said Captain Rob, to the driver. "There ar' five eagles for a good job; death for a bad one!"

The man nodded and opened the back door. Ruby Rob sprung in, settled himself back among the cushions, and drew and cocked a revolver.

"A fool for luck!" he said to himself, with a triumphant chuckle. "The bonanza isn't lost yet. I kin play a winning game in the city as well as in the mountains. My trail among the cab drives ov Frisco warn't a foolish one for all. Agate Alf laughed when I suggested it; but I didn't think it a forlorn hope."

Meantime the hack had started, and Ruby with his boots on the seat before him, was being whisked through the streets of the Golden City at a lively rate.

He was proving quite a match for the Texas cool-blade, who was playing a desperate game for Kate Lossing's millions. The colonel might outwit Cuban Con, he might strangle Anita and take the gold-girl from the Spanish-blooded sport's power; but he had found his match in the boss of Satanscrown, who could foil him anywhere.

Captain Rob, riding through the California city, did not think for a second that the hack was carrying three. He knew that he was the only person inside, and he had cocked his revolver for the driver.

Behind the vehicle, and almost under the seat occupied by the Colorado sport, was a dark object doubled up like an animal.

It hung on with much tenacity, for the hack bounced over some pretty rough places without shaking the third passenger off.

"This is to be an important ride," muttered this strange rider. "If Captain Rob has actually found a clew to Colonel Tarantula, I will have it in my hands. What do I care if the irons under this hack are almost skinning me alive? This is a play for Kate."

On—on went the vehicle, as if it was bearing the Colorado sport to the end of the city. More than once he leaned forward and looked out, as if to see whether he was being carried in the right direction, but the streets looked strange, and he was obliged to fall back and await results.

At last the carriage turned a certain corner, and the gait of the horses decreased; the next moment they had dropped into a walk.

"We are nearly there," said the person under the vehicle, and at the same time Captain Rob made a similar remark.

The man on the box drew the reins at last, and the carriage stopped.

Ruby Rob felt for the door-handle in his eagerness to alight, but the driver sprung down and opened it a little.

"It is the sixth house to the right, up the street," he said. "I thought you didn't want me to stop in front of it."

"By Jove! that war shrewdness on your part," said the mountain sport. "The sixth house, eh? You will wait for me hyer. I won't be gone long."

Ruby Rob stood on the sidewalk, and in the light of the only lamp near. He saw only the man who had driven him to California street; he did not notice the person who stood in the shadow of the cab.

All at once this person stepped out.

"Throw up your hands!" he said, in a voice that went through Captain Rob like the sting of an Apache spear. "Hands up, Captain Rob, of Satanscrown!"

At the curbing stood the speaker with two leveled revolvers, and in the hands that held them out there was no quiver.

The sport grew dark in the face and his eyes flashed; despite the stern commands, one of his hands went toward his weapon, but did not draw it forth.

"In fate's name, who ar' you?" growled the Satanscrown sport.

"The person who did *not* fall into your cabin pit when Topaz Tom dropped before Colorado Carlos's revolver."

"Idaho Ivan!" exclaimed the mountain tough.

"Idaho Ivan, Captain Rob. Your carriage has carried three. I am in luck, not you, tonight. Go back into the hack!"

The man from Satanscrown ground his teeth and gave the young miner a defiant look.

"You will not, eh? Then I will kill you in

your boots and where you stand. Stand back, driver. I don't want to paint you with this gold demon's blood! Once more, Ruby Rob—into the carriage!"

The foiled desperado went toward the vehicle, the door of which stood open.

"A thousand dollars if I had known this young fox was under me," he said to himself, and as the door closed on him he heard the boy say sternly to the driver:

"Get up and drive that man back!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HOUSE OF THE CRIMSON TRUMP.

"THIS," said the young miner as the horses started off, "This is my lucky night or seems to be."

He turned toward the house designated by the driver when he opened the door for Captain Rob to alight.

"Mountain Moss is yonder," he continued. "I have found her at last after the long trail from Satanscrown to Frisco. If Ruby Rob had imagined that I was clinging to his cab, he wouldn't have failed as he has. Pious Phil thought he had found a clew when we separated a while ago, but I am the one who has succeeded."

The vehicle carrying Ruby Rob away had turned a corner and Idaho Ivan did not see the door open, nor hear the voice that called a halt.

"I'm not going to let a boy beat me," grated the man who sprung out pistol in hand. "I'll go back and end this part of the game by shooting him dead!"

The sport of Satanscrown was capable of doing just such a deed.

"What shall I do, cap'n?" asked the driver. "I don't like the looks o' thet young ferret who rode all the way up here between the wheels."

"Go whar you please," said Ruby Rob tossing the man several gold-pieces. "I know this part of Frisco better than any other, an' if the house you mention is the sixth one from the corner I know it all over. My dead pard, Lion Dick, ran a private game in it for two years."

The driver of the carriage was eager to get away. He thrust the gold-pieces into his pocket, gave his team the whip and rattled away.

"I'm not euchered till the last card has been played," growled the stalwart fellow who walked back toward California street. "I will have the bonanza bird in my cage before morning! Baffled by a boy? I haven't come to that yet."

In the mean time, Idaho Ivan had walked toward the house supposed to contain the object of his quest, the heiress of the Golden Gate.

Outwardly there was no visible sign that the old two-story brick structure had a single inmate. It was beyond the light of the nearest street lamp and its whole front was cast in shadow.

There might have been people living near who could have told the young miner that the place had a bad reputation. It had been the scene of more than one private faro game, and its owners had been men who had the record of the desperado.

Idaho Ivan did not like the appearance of the house. It looked dangerous from the outside, and might well be suspected of being dangerous within.

"I am here to find Kate," said the boy after his brief inspection. "If there were a dozen houses like this to be searched I would not hesitate."

He did not like the idea of seeking an entrance by the front door. Of course he would find it locked, and if he knocked there was no telling who would open it, or whether it would be opened at all.

Almost directly opposite was a quiet-looking saloon whose windows were painted so that no one from the outside could see within.

"I will know something about this house," said Idaho Ivan while he looked at the saloon, and then he crossed the street and entered it.

A man was drinking at the counter; he was the only visible customer of the place at the time, and his figure sent a thrill through the young Coloradan.

The opening of the door made noise enough to cause the lone customer to wheel upon the visitor.

Idaho Ivan recoiled the instant their eyes met.

"Colonel Tarantula!" he exclaimed.

"You hyer, you young ferret?" flashed the man from Texas, and then there was an oath and a bound, and Idaho Ivan, with his revolver half-drawn, was in the clutches of the cool blade.

The barkeeper, a desperate looking fellow, seemed to enjoy the exciting scene.

"Caught a ferret, eh, colonel?" he laughed as he leaned over the counter. "Thet reminds me how I war once hunted by a youngster in Denver. Ha! he's a daisy, he is! Hold him fast! Them ar' eyes mean business, or I'm not Glory George o' Golden Gulch."

Idaho Ivan was safely lodged in the grip of the man who held him. He had never been so close to the cool Texan before.

"I thought I finished you in Satanscrown," hissed Colonel Tarantula. "You must have as

many eyes as a cat. You war playin' Injun thar, but arter I gave you the bowie, I went back an' saw yer white skin. Then I knowed thet you war Idaho Ivan ov Trigger Bar. Huntin' me, eh? Wal, hyer I am, as large as life an' as dangerous as ever."

The Texas tough need not have finished the sentence thus. His look was proof of the statement, and the next moment he turned toward the man behind the bar and laughed.

"George, what did you do with the boy ferret you caught in Denver?" he asked.

"What d'yer imagine, colonel? D'yer think I let 'im go? I hev been taken for a fool more'n once in my lifetime, but it isn't on ther books thet I war one then. Why, I skinned my ferret!"

There was a hideous grin on Glory George's face when he finished.

"I advise you ter sarve yours ther same way," continued the whisky-seller. "It ain't good policy ter let these kind o' humans git away."

"Do you hear that advice, boy?" asked Colonel Tarantula.

"Yes."

"Wal, what do you think of it?"

"It is the advice to be expected from a man like that."

"You followed me here?"

"I did not, but I have found you."

"For the last time!" was the quick retort.

"You have come into this part o' Frisco to see the inside of a sartain house. I will now accommodate you."

Colonel Tarantula, though not a giant in stature, was powerful enough to drag Idaho Ivan to the door. Glory George gave him an approving smile when their eyes met, and a moment later the young miner was moving once more upon the house.

This was an advance he had not looked for. His mission to the saloon had resulted most disastrously.

"Have I trailed this Texas monster all the way from Satanscrown, to fall into his merciless talons?" he ejaculated. "This is one of the mysterious moves of fate. I am going into Mountain Moss's prison, but the grip of Colonel Tarantula is upon me. Heaven help me now!"

The journey across the street did not occupy a minute. Idaho Ivan soon stood on the steps of the dangerous house with the man who was his worst enemy. What could he expect from a desperado who was playing for millions? This man had killed Dashwood the tongueless in Satanscrown and Colorado Carlos in San Francisco. And both in cold blood!

Colonel Tarantula produced a key from his pocket and opened the door. He did not loosen his grip on the boy; one hand with his vise-like power seemed enough to hold a giant.

Idaho Ivan was taken into a hall that had a carpet. There was no light, and the old house was as silent as the tomb. The door that shut beneath Colonel Tarantula gave out a faint click which told that it had a spring lock.

"Make no sound!" was spoken in low tones at the boy's ear and with that sternness that accompanied all the ruffian's speeches. "If you knew the reputation of this house you would never have left the gold-fields of Colorado. This is the House of the Crimson Trump!"

"No!" said the boy, hardly above his breath.

"Ah! you have heard of it!" cried the colonel. "There isn't a mining-camp within two thousand miles of Frisco that hasn't had some stories about this house told in it. Its best days ar' past, but it is good for some things yet, as I'm likely ter show yer."

Idaho Ivan was taken down the dark hall and into a room equally as dark.

The fame of this house, if it was the House of the Crimson Trump, had reached Trigger Bar. He had heard the origin of its name, a story about a handsome gambler found dead in it with his last card crimsoned with his life-blood. It was a house with a hundred tales, and not one of them good.

In the room into which Colonel Tarantula conducted the young miner, a match was struck, and the youth saw an old faro-table with several chairs in position.

The table was uncommonly deep, a fact which at once attracted Idaho Ivan's attention.

Before the match went out Colonel Tarantula lit a lamp provided with a polished reflector placed in such a position that the light fell upon the table solely.

"Your trail is goin' ter end in the House of the Crimson Trump," said the Texan, glaring down into Idaho Ivan's face with rage and triumph unabated. "I would sooner be followed by a man than a boy. You know where to look for a man, but a boy will foil you. You ar' on the bonanza trail, too?"

Idaho Ivan straightened as much as the grip of the ruffian would permit.

"I am hunting Mountain Moss. You know that, Colonel Tarantula," he said. "We know now that she is Kate Lossing lost eight years ago, that she is heiress to three and a quarter millions kept in trust for her by three men of whom Leroy La Croix the banker is the chief."

"An' a rascal from the ground up!" said the colonel.

"I don't know about that."

"I do. I have interviewed him an' read him like a book. He has detectives in his pay lookin' for me because I told him that I had found the girl he wants dead! I admit that this is the most gigantic game I ever played; but look at the stake, boy! Three millions an' more! Whew! Do you think you're near Golden Gate Kate?"

The boy's eyes glittered, which seemed answer enough for the chaparral colonel.

"She isn't a thousand miles from hyer," he said, with a smile. "You're a pretty keen fox, Idaho; but I've an idea that you got some over yer cunning from that lean reynard, Pious Phil o' Trigger Bar. When I've raked in ther three an' a quarter I'll come hyer, mebbe, an' let you out."

"Let me out?" echoed Idaho Ivan, his eyes dilating with wonder. "What do you mean?"

Colonel Tarantula went toward the table and placed one hand upon it.

"In this room, but not at this table, died the man who named this house," continued the colonel. "This table is a coffin. See!"

At that moment the faro-table parted in the middle lengthwise, disclosing an interior that seemed to be lined with dark plush.

Idaho Ivan involuntarily drew back.

"Come! there is to be no escape," said Colonel Tarantula, and his grip tightened on the boy miner.

"This table holds its victim securely until some one familiar with its secret sees fit to set him free. It has held prisoners before—men who have been hunted for all over Frisco. Ah! my mountain ferret, the table has opened for you!"

Idaho Ivan felt a cold sensation at his heart. He saw no mercy in the eyes that laughed tigerishly at him, as he recoiled from the death-trap.

"Thar's three an' a quarter millions at stake, remember that!" exclaimed Colonel Tarantula, and the young miner was lifted from the floor before he could inaugurate resistance.

It was a terrible moment.

"Say I don't hold the winning hand, will yer?" cried the Texan. "Inter ther faro-coffin you go, Idaho, while I rake in the whole lay-out!"

The end of the boast was the last thing the boy heard. He was crushed into the opening by a power that a man could not have resisted. A merciless hand was closing like a vise at his throat. It was suddenly withdrawn, and then darkness and suffocation followed!

All this terrible experience was contracted into the bounds of a minute.

"With my fingers on ther bonanza who shall foil me now?" said the man who stepped back.

The next moment a sound like the shutting of a door struck his ear.

"Jupiter Pluvius! There's some one at large in the house!"

He sprang to the lamp and turned it out, then, with a heavy revolver in his right hand, he went to the door and listened.

"Thar's a man in the house!" he muttered.

"Who can it be?"

He did not think of Ruby Rob.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TIGERS IN THE DARK.

THERE was something thrilling in the man waiting in the gloom of the infamous house, for a repetition of the sounds that had struck his ears.

Colonel Tarantula was no coward; he had played many strange games in his lifetime, but not one had been a game of cowardice.

The mechanism of the faro-table held the young miner fast, and in a minute the colonel had almost entirely forgotten him. He was absorbed in the game now before him, and was waiting revolver in hand for the man who had undoubtedly entered the House of the Crimson Trump from the rear.

The door at which he stood was slightly ajar; it looked into the hallway entered by the door on the street, and nearly opposite the door at which the Texas cool-blade stood, was another opening into a room equipped with a second unused faro-table.

Colonel Tarantula knew the interior of the house perfectly. Although he had not inspected it for several years past, he could go all over it in the dark, and he knew the traps that had helped to make it one of the most dangerous buildings in San Francisco.

For several minutes after he had reached the door, Colonel Tarantula heard no sounds. He stood in the dark ready to launch himself, tiger-like, upon the first comer.

After awhile he saw a flash like a match leaping into life amid the densest gloom, but it went out as suddenly as it had come into being.

"I was right," muttered the colonel. "Some one who is playing for the Frisco millions is in the house."

The next moment he heard the sound of a footstep. It was in the hall directly before him. He straightened in the doorway, put up the revolver, and silently drew a knife.

"This is better than the dropper. It talks in whispers, but it is deadly, all the same," he said.

Each second seemed ten minutes to the colonel now. The unseen man, whoever he was, was making slow progress in the dark. It was evident that he had removed his boots.

At last a hand was laid on the jamb of the door—the one touched by Colonel Tarantula's shoulder! It barely touched the man from Texas.

"This is ther room whar ther table trap is," said a voice.

The sound of these words went through the colonel like a knife.

He had heard them before and he knew where.

Suddenly he drew back from the door, clutched his bowie's hilt more firmly, and then threw himself forward like a lion.

He seemed to know exactly where to leap. He could not have hit the unseen target better if he had sprung at it in daylight.

"Jupiter! hyer's a tiger!" said the man struck by the Texan in the dark.

"You can bet yer life—a royal Texan tiger at that!" grated Tarantula, and his strength forced his antagonist across the hall and up against the wall although that antagonist was his physical superior.

It seemed to take the attacked man half a minute to recover, and that time brief as it was threatened to be fatal to him. Then began the real struggle for the mastery; the two men grappled and began to fight like beasts matched in the jungle's heart.

They went down upon the floor and writhed there, each trying all the while to loosen the bowie he carried. Such a combat within its walls the House of the Crimson Trump had never seen before.

A battle like this could not last long.

During it all neither of the men had spoken, but their hot breaths had fallen thick and fast upon each other's cheeks. At last Colonel Tarantula found the hilt of a bowie. It was not his own as the first touch told him, but what cared he for that? Clutching it firmly he whipped it out only to find a hand grasp his wrist to prevent the blow he intended to make.

The Texas whirlwind shut his teeth hard and jerked his arm loose. A sharp cry followed his success and hard upon it he struck where he thought the heart of his enemy ought to be!

The blow dealt with all his power was followed by a sharper cry, and the next moment the two men were apart, the colonel erect, with the strange knife in his hand and ready for a renewal of the combat if the blow already dealt had not sufficed.

Where was his enemy?—Dead?

For several minutes the only answer was silence, then a slight noise near the front door made the colonel turn in that direction.

"Some men ar' born fools!" said a rough voice. "Colonel Tarantula, I am in prime fightin' condition an' dark as it is, I'll bet a thousand that I hev ther drop on yer!"

Colonel Tarantula started.

"I did not settle him!" he grated. "Ruby Rob is ready to renew the duel while I can't without a rest."

The next moment the chaparral king quietly drew his revolver and crouched on the floor.

"I think I know whar my target is," he said between his teeth as he moved the weapon forward till his arm was straight.

All at once the dark hall was filled as it were with a vivid flash and a loud report.

Colonel Tarantula had fired at the foe in the dark.

The shot was accompanied by a heavy fall, but no death-cry or groan, then all was still again.

"That man must be a wizard," said the astonished Texan, as he waited with his finger on the trigger for the result of his fire. Silence again!

Colonel Tarantula stood up hardly breathing. It was the most singular, and perhaps the most terrible adventure of his life.

At last he went forward to the door that opened into the second faro room. He crept inside with no noise, as he thought, and was about to change front when the door closed with a bang, and he was a prisoner in the room!

Captain Rob was still a lively corpse, and decidedly he was on top again!

An oath of amazement rattled from Colonel Tarantula's throat.

"This beats all my wildest games!" he ejaculated as his first thought was to open the door and shoot point-blank into the face of the man supposed to be holding it. "For once in my life, I have encountered my equal. I was a fool for not shooting this man the night he robbed me in Taos years ago."

At that moment the hall outside became brilliantly lighted. Ruby Rob had turned on the gas thus revealing the door and giving him a chance to guard it for the appearance of the Texas sport on the inside.

Colonel Tarantula saw the light over the transom and understood his enemy's action. He was now the tiger in the cage.

As for the sport in the hall, his eyes flashed brilliantly. His clothes showed marks of the desperate struggle which had just been concluded.

Ruby Rob had entered the famous house from the rear after leaving the cab, into which Idaho Ivan had forced him at the revolver's muzzle; as we have seen.

A frequenter of San Francisco's faro resorts a few years previous to the date of our story, and the companion of one Lion Dick, a former owner of the house, he knew it as well as did Colonel Tarantula.

For some time he watched the door that had closed upon the beaten Texan, and the revolver clutched in his right hand was ready to move up and cover the man daring enough to open it.

"This is a two-handed game, colonel," he suddenly called out. "Since you've transferred it from Satanscrown ter Frisco, I'm willin' ter play it out hyar."

"It shall be played out!" came from the room beside the hall. "The coward of Satanscrown dare not meet me face ter face an' bowie ter bowie in ther hall under ther gas. I've got yer bowie, Captain Rob, but accept my challenge an' I'll toss it ter yer over ther transom."

"Never mind, colonel," laughed the man in the hall. "Don't be so eager for a fight. Mebbe we'll meet on better terms hyerafter."

"You an' me?"

"Yes, my chaparral tiger."

"Never!"

"Oh, well, suit yerself!" was the reply, in the same laughing but sarcastic strain. "I'm always on hand when I'm wanted, but just now I can't oblige yer, colonel."

"Coward!" hissed the fierce-eyed man, standing in the light that came through the transom. "I've killed better men than you among ther Taos Greasers!"

There was no answer, and the words died away in a hiss.

If Colonel Tarantula could have looked beyond the door at that moment, he would have seen Ruby Rob spring forward with a small coil of rope in his hands.

At one end of the cord was a slip-noose like a lasso, and all at once the bronzed hands of the Satanscrown boss threw it over the door-knob, drew it tight, and held it with all his strength.

The Texan tough heard the jar of the knob on the inside and seized it instantly, but quick as he was the Colorado sport was quicker, and in a flash the other end of the rope was secure to the strong railing of the stairs that ascended from the hall.

"A rope's no slouch even in Frisco, colonel," came down from the transom. "When you get to ther end ov this little gold-game, please count yer chips an' I'll cash 'em all!"

This was exasperating. Colonel Tarantula reached up and caught the door-frame overhead.

Then, gripping his pistol-barrel with his teeth, he drew himself up and looked through the transom. It was not likely that Ruby Rob was expecting a play of this kind. In a moment the colonel saw his foe half-way up the steps, and his magnificent figure was a splendid target under the gas.

Up went the revolver as the man from Texas drew himself up with one hand, and nerved himself for the shot.

"It is my game yet! All the princes of Hades can't eucher the chaparral king!"

The muzzle of the weapon almost touched the transom glass, and the finger of the colonel was at the trigger when Captain Rob moved.

"Ah! I'll catch you in a moment!" he said.

In a moment something else happened.

All at once the man on the stair seemed to see the ferocious face and the gleaming eyes pressed almost against the transom.

"Hal! is thet yer game, colonel?" he laughed maliciously, and then before the chaparral tough could play, the transom was shattered around him, and he dropped to the floor like a man shot dead!

"By Heaven! he beats lightning!" grated the colonel, as he picked himself up after one of the luckiest escapes of his life. "The game for the three millions is getting hot!"

The man in the hall went up the steps into darkness.

"I will have my own way now," he said, in triumphant tones. "If the heiress of the Golden Gate is in this house I will find her."

He turned down the narrow corridor that led from the landing and found a door. The moment he touched it his keen ears caught a sound from the inside.

"Mountain Moss?" he asked.

"I am here! Ah! you are not Colonel Tarantula! that is not his voice," said the person beyond the door.

"I have found her ag'in!" ejaculated Ruby Rob. "Open the door," he said.

"I cannot. I have no key."

"Then, stand back!"

As he uttered this command, the Satanscrown sport stepped back a pace and gathered his strength.

"Thar's only a door between me an' three millions," he murmured; then like a Titan he dashed at the portal.

Such a charge was irresistible; the door quivered, gave way, and fell in.

"Heavens! you?" greeted the mountain sport as he landed in the middle of the room, and saw a beautiful girl recoil with a white face. "I was not thinking about you, Ruby Rob. Better—"

"Better Colonel Tarantula, my daisy?" laughed the Coloradan. "Not that, I hope. Ther trumps ar' all in my hands, an' ther deck is cut fer ther last play. Ther man down-stairs will never introduce you ter yer millions. Come!"

His hand was at her wrist, but Mountain Moss drew back.

"Nothing checks this Colorado cyclone!" said Captain Rob, and the next moment he was descending the stair with the Golden Gate heiress between him and the door that held Colonel Tarantula in the trap.

Once more in the big game, Captain Rob of Satanscrown was on top.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DEVIL IN BROADCLOTH.

TRUE it was, that Leroy La Croix the banker had employed the best detective talent of San Francisco. The revelations made by Colonel Tarantula when that cool individual called at the private office, were enough to shock him.

The ring produced on that occasion told the main trustee of the three and a quarter millions that Kate Lossing was still alive, and he had reasons for believing that she was where the Texan could lay his hands on her whenever she was wanted.

Some of the detectives employed by the banker were to ransack the city for Tarantula, while others watched the office on Montgomery street and the elegant residence on Nob Hill, for La Croix expected a second visit.

This is why Onyx Oll, when he called, fell into the hands of two men who conducted him to the station-house as has been witnessed.

The Satanscrown sport had startled the banker by calling him Gold Gaston of Catfish Camp, a title which indicated that at a certain period in his career, the California nabob had been a mountain rough like many of his now wealthy acquaintances. He thought best to secure this bold fellow and have him held by a charge of attempted blackmail, especially since he knew something about the Golden Gate heiress, and might possibly be connected with the cool blade from Texas.

Onyx Oll, therefore, was hustled into the station, where the name and position of Leroy La Croix were enough to hold him indefinitely. The mountain tough knew this, and when there came no answer to the letter he sent to Captain Rob by a boy, he growled like a tiger behind the bars.

The banker's detectives were spurred to work by the promise of a big fee, and they hunted high and low for the man so badly wanted by the gold nabob.

The main man of the gang assured La Croix that Jordan Geffroy (Colonel Tarantula) would be unearthed within a few hours, but when a night and a day had passed without any reported success the banker began to worry.

Could it be that the Texan had not brought the girl to the city, that he had kept her at a safe distance in one of the near camps and that he had gone back to her?

La Croix was not inclined to give up those three and a quarter millions. He had had use of the original estate for eight years, and it had increased wonderfully. Now, to give it up—to see it slip through his fingers and, mayhap, fall into the hands of a desperado who was playing a cool game for it—this was too much!

The truth is that a shrewder and more desperate man than this very nabob of Nob Hill did not inhabit San Francisco. Onyx Oll sized him up when he called him Gold Gaston of Catfish Camp; he was sleeker now than when he was a penniless ruffian in the shadow of Mount Shasta, but he had not forgotten how to meet steel with steel.

"I must get this man before he plays the hand he holds," he said. "I must get the girl, too. By the eternal heavens, I am not going to let this bonanza slip through the hand that has held it so long! Nothing shall stand long between me and the millions of the major. No living hand shall be stretched forth now to snatch them from my grasp. I will kill if it becomes necessary! I will show these gold hyenas that Gold Gaston has not forgot his old training!"

Leroy La Croix gave utterance to these words in the sanctity of his private office in the bank building. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the busiest hour for the bank. Outside a warm sun was shining and the broad streets of the gold-coast metropolis were thronged with people.

At that hour a man who was faultlessly dressed in a new suit that showed off his magnificent figure to advantage, entered the bank and walked to the cashier's window.

He was tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, and the razor had not been long from the face that wore only a heavy jet-black mustache that covered his mouth and was waxed at both ends.

"Mephistopheles in broadcloth," whispered

one man to another when he saw this stranger Apollo.

He asked at the cashier's window for La Croix and was told that he was engaged in his private office.

"I must see him," said the stranger, with an emphasis that attached a certain importance to his visit. "I see the door to my right. You need not announce me—I will do that."

"Mr. La Croix is alone, I believe," responded the cashier, but the man had turned away and was gone.

Leroy La Croix was lighting a cigar when the door of his private office opened and admitted the handsome man.

The banker started. He was not expecting a caller unannounced, and especially not one of this description. If one of his detectives had come he would not have cared for the interruption, but here was a man he had never faced before.

The stranger shut the door carefully behind him, as if he knew that when it was shut no sound could enter or leave the private office, which was the case.

He took off his hat and bowed to the banker, and then dropped into a splendid chair so near that his knees almost touched La Croix's.

"My name is Phantom—Robert Phantom, but I'm flesh and blood for all that," he said, with a smile. "I am here on business of the utmost importance. Shall I proceed, colonel?"

Leroy La Croix made no reply.

There was a cool deviltry about this fellow which told that he would proceed whether permission was granted or not, and the next second he carried out the banker's estimate of him.

"Eight years ago Major Lossing and his daughter Kate, then a child, left San Francisco overland for St. Louis," he went on, the first words almost driving the millionaire from his chair. "The major was murdered, the girl disappeared. You became trustee of the property left by the unfortunate man. It aggregates three and a quarter millions by the last report. The girl has never come to claim it from your hands. There is a prevalent belief that she is dead, but she is not. I am her husband!"

An exclamation which he could not keep back escaped from the banker's throat.

This man was not Colonel Tarantula. He was a new person in the game, and the nabob saw at once that he was dangerous.

What! this fellow the gold heiress's husband? Geffroy, or Colonel Tarantula, had intimated that he might exercise that right, but here was a new man, Robert Phantom, declaring with emphasis that Kate Lossing was his wife!

It is not strange that the Frisco banker should appear thunderstruck at this unprepared revelation. He lost color, he seemed to gasp, and his eyes dilated.

"You—her—husband?" he made out to say.

"That's what I am," was the answer, accompanied by a satisfied smile. "The major's daughter, now the prettiest creature in California, is my wife. According to the terms of the will, she is to be paid the whole amount due her at once. I am here to announce her marriage, and to say that I am her lawful agent."

"You must excuse me, but this is sudden," said La Croix, mastering himself by a powerful effort of the will. "I was not expecting anything of this kind."

"I should suppose not, but it is the unexpected that happens, colonel."

Shutting his teeth hard, Leroy La Croix wheeled his chair half-way around and put out his hand toward the drawer of a small stand near by.

"I've got to kill this man—to shoot him dead in his chair!" he said between his teeth, and his hand fell on the white knob of the drawer in which lay ready for an emergency a self-cocking revolver.

It would be the work of a moment to seize the weapon, whirl about and whisk out the life of the desperado in broadcloth.

"I'll show you the will; I have it here," said the banker to disarm suspicion.

The next second he opened the drawer, and his hand darting downward, clutched the six-shooter.

"I'll widow the Golden Gate Venus!" he said.

The next instant the visitor sprung up, and his hand swooped down upon La Croix's right wrist like a hungry eagle.

"That's your will, eh?" he laughed, glaring at the revolver half-way out of the drawer. "It isn't the kind I propose to have read in my teeth. Drop that six-shooter, sir, or I'll strangle you within six feet of your bonanza vaults!"

The thunderstruck banker had only to look up into the devilish face above him to see that the speaker was terribly in earnest. What eyes that man had! In a moment he was transformed into a grinning Satan, and the gloved hand at the banker's wrist seemed to be burning its way to the bone.

"I am here for the three and a quarter millions!" he went on. "You shall pay every cent to me. I am the girl's lawful husband. I have the marriage certificate in my pocket. What I came from I am Captain Rob; here for the present hour I am Robert Phantom. I have played games of all kinds. I know that you

are Gold Gaston, the once muleteer of Catfish Camp. Now you live like a nabob on Nob Hill, and on Kate Lossing's money, too! There! that is sensible. You have dropped the revolver with which you were going to scatter my brains over your magnificent carpet. It wouldn't have done you any good, colonel. I have a man outside who would take my place and play this gold game out. Turn back and listen to me."

Ruby Rob turned the baffled banker's chair and shut the drawer.

Leroy La Croix was the picture of foiled rage. The cool Satan from the gold-camps had the upper hand. What would he do next?

"The girl's wealth is in Government bonds," he said, looking into La Croix's face. "They are in your vault. I want them."

"The will says that the girl must be produced first."

"Hang the will! I have the girl. She is the wife of Ruby Rob of Satanscrown. You would grow paler than you are if you knew what a big game has been played for her. Men have been shot on sight. I have fought my way to this stage of proceedings. Donald Dashwood the tongueless man was killed first; I took the trail where he left it. Colorado Carlos is still at the morgue, Colonel Tarantula has cashed his chips at death's counter. I am the holder of the last big hand. Now, sir," the speaker went on before the banker could find his tongue, "you will go into the bank proper and ask your cashier to hand you the Lossing papers. I will stand at the door and see you all the time. If you attempt to betray me—if you exhibit a sign of treachery—I will kill you in your boots! You have played a gold hand for eight years. I am playing a diamond one now."

Captain Rob walked to the door that led from the private office into the banking-room. He laid his left hand on the knob and looked at the once muleteer of Catfish Camp. In his right hand hanging along his leg he clutched a silver-mounted revolver.

"Turn over the bonanza!" he continued as his eyes glistened. "Walk in, colonel, and fill my order."

Choking down his rage, the nabob-rough stepped forward. Captain Rob opened the door and saw him walk into the bank. The eyes of the Satanscrown sport watched him like the eyes of a hawk.

La Croix walked to his cashier and asked for the precious documents. The bank official started and threw a glance toward the cool fiend standing in the door, but the next moment he walked to the open vault and took out a large packet marked:

"Lossing: Private and valuable, 3¼."

The Frisco banker took the package with reluctance. He knew that a merciless man was waiting for it only a few feet away. He would have given half his wealth for a revolver at that moment.

With the package in his hand, he passed back into the private office, and Ruby Rob shut the door.

"Hand it over," he said to La Croix. "Maybe we'll pay you a per cent. in the sweet by and by, but I won't promise. Ah! it is heavy. All here, eh?"

"All!" said the Californian.

The Satanscrown tough clutched the packet and turned toward the door that led into the outer room of the bank.

"You will hunt me, I guess?" he said, with a smile.

"You can bet your heart on that!" grated La Croix.

"All right! I know what to do then. Thanks for the information. I never give up a stake when once won! If you set a bloodhound on my trail, by the thunders of Jove! you won't live twenty-four hours!"

The door opened and closed, and Leroy La Croix sunk with a groan into his chair.

The Lossing millions had vanished.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FIGHTING FOR THE TREASURE.

WE go back a few hours, and to the House of the Crimson Trump.

The reader need not be told that Ruby Rob escaped from the infamous building with the beautiful stake of the big gold-game—Golden Gate Kate. His appearance before Leroy La Croix in the private office of the bank is proof enough of this.

We go back to the house to ascertain the fate of a not unimportant character of our romance.

Colonel Tarantula believed that the faro-table ended the career of Idaho Ivan when its jaws closed noiselessly upon him. In this the Texas cool-blade was mistaken.

There might have been a time when the table was a certain death-trap, but it had not been used as such for many months, and the moths had made sad havoc with its soft yet deadly lining.

The closing of the jaws and the first sense of suffocation rendered the boy unconscious, and he remained so until after the encounter between Tarantula and Ruby Rob.

When he awakened, he found himself in the dark and imprisoned in a place that to him felt

very much like a coffin. In a moment, however he realized where he was, for the last adventure rushed vividly across his mind, and he saw the ferocious face of the chaparral desperado and heard again his last triumphant utterance.

The silence of the tomb kept Idaho Ivan company in the table-trap, but he soon became aware that he was being supplied with air from without and his hands told him that the padded sides were easily torn.

To get out was the first important move, and he went to work.

He believed that Colonel Tarantula thought him done for and that he had probably left the house. Idaho Ivan tore the padding from one of the sides of his coffin and found a strong wire which ran from top to bottom. Was this the machinery which worked the table, for he noticed that it had seemingly opened at a touch of the Texan's hand.

Clutching the wire he tugged at it with all the strength he could operate in that close place, and all at once the trap parted so suddenly that, before he could realize what had happened, he was thrown out on the floor.

The young miner picked himself up in a dark room, but he soon found a door which led him into the hall. Then he found the steps.

Not a sound reached his ears; the old house was as silent as had been his plush-lined tomb.

"If Kate is in this house, I will know it," he ejaculated. "I have escaped alive from one of Colonel Tarantula's traps. I am not afraid to brave another."

Believing that he would find the missing girl on the upper floor he went up the steps cautiously and unarmed.

"It cannot be that this house is inhabited now; it is too still," he said, on the landing above.

Becoming braver, he struck a match and then saw the door which Captain Rob had broken in his eagerness to reach the Golden Gate heiress.

The empty room told the story when it was briefly explored.

Kate was gone!

For a moment Idaho Ivan stood spellbound by this discovery.

He did not think of Ruby Rob, yet he could not see why Colonel Tarantula, the jailer, would have to break down a door to get to his prisoner.

It was a mystery to the young gold-digger.

He was not satisfied until he had explored every room of that desperate old mansion. He found nobody living or dead.

It was evident that Colonel Tarantula had left him to his fate.

"I must go back to Pious Phil," he said to himself. "Together we must run this Texas tiger down. Time is precious now. Kate is liable to be presented at any time, and if the colonel gets his fingers on the millions, it is 'good-by, bonanza!'"

After this Idaho Ivan lost no time in reaching the street. He went to the little hotel at which he and Pious Phil had put up, but the lean Alcalde of Trigger Bar was not there. If he was on a trail of some kind, the young detective would have to wait for him.

The night passed and the old pard did not come. Idaho Ivan was out bright and early. The mystery that hung around Kate's fate tortured him, and the hours only increased it. He went out with eyes on the alert for more persons than Pious Phil. He was searching for Colonel Tarantula, Ruby Rob and his last two pards, Onyx Oil and Agate Alf.

The day was wearing away without any revelations, and at two o'clock in the afternoon he saw two men approach the bank on Montgomery street.

"A find at last!" ejaculated the boy. "Ruby Rob and Agate Alf!"

He saw the latter sport station himself before the door, while Captain Rob, dressed like a dandy, entered the institution and disappeared.

"Some play is to be made now," muttered Idaho Ivan. "Would Captain Rob call on La Croix, the trustee of the bonanza, if he had not a good hand? And dressed to kill, too. Something is up."

He waited with his eyes on the door, and the Satanscrown sport loitering, not aimlessly, before it.

If he had known what was going on inside, he would have pushed his way to the private office, and surprised the two men there.

At last Ruby Rob emerged from the bank. There was triumph in the boss sport's eyes, and Idaho Ivan saw him show his pard a package ere he thrust it under his coat.

The young miner was watching from a point of observation across the street. When the two sports started off he moved, too, but kept his eyes fastened upon them.

All at once a hand fell on his shoulder. He looked up and saw a face that drew an exclamation of joy from his lips.

"You're the man I want just now, Pious Phil!" he exclaimed. "I have been waiting for you since last night. Those two fellows yonder have played a cool hand on the trustee of Kate's fortunes. In short, Ruby Rob has robbed him. You know what the Satanscrown fiend would take."

"Ther millions!—nothin' else," exclaimed the lean alcalde. "I didn't get in last night, eh?"

"No."

"I struck a trail that I followed till almost dawn. Nugget Nell is in Frisco. She came hyer for a sartain purpose an' that purpose is ter kill Kate ef she kin run her down."

Idaho Ivan could not suppress a startling ejaculation.

"She believes that ther girl will insnare Ruby Rob with her beauty, an' leave her in ther lurch. Nothin' else would ever hev brought that woman ter Frisco whar he is wanted for her worst crime. Years ago she administered certain potions to a man an' deprived him of his reason. I have discovered that her victim is Ruby Rob's brother. I war trackin' this pantheress last night."

"Well?"

"She didn't find ther girl. She found Colonel Tarantula, though, an' lost him again."

"Why didn't you keep track of the Texan?"

"I tried ter, but lost him, too," said Pious Phil with a smile. "So you think Ruby Rob an' Agate played a cool hand at ther bank, eh?"

"I am certain of it. Captain Rob has the prize in his bosom."

"Ha! he doesn't carry it whar ther Silent Hound used ter—in his boot," laughed the old alcalde.

As the two pards kept sight of Ruby Rob and Agate Alf who dodged from street to street, Idaho Ivan detailed his strange and thrilling adventures of the night before.

"I war nigh thet very house about thet time trackin' Nugget Nell! Heavens! ef I hed only knowed you war thar!" exclaimed Pious Phil.

The boy's countenance assumed an expression of disappointment, but all at once his eyes brightened and he looked up into the alcalde's face.

"Did you finally locate the Satanscrown Cleopatra?" he asked.

"I know whar she is ter be found."

"Good! She must not find Kate."

"If she does I wouldn't give a copper for Kate's life," was the reply. "I saw enough of that woman last night. She knows San Francisco like a book. If Captain Rob knew that she was Viper Bess, the enchantress who made his brother mad, I b'lieve he'd hunt her down fir-t. I wish I could tell him," and Pious Phil glanced at the men they were following.

"Look!" he suddenly went on. "Captain Rob has got a tracker. Notice that man just behind him, the man who limps a little."

"I see him," said the boy.

"A Mexican's bullet gave him that limp years ago in Santa Fe. That man is Colonel Tarantula."

Idaho Ivan almost left the ground.

It was true that a new sleuth-hound had thrown himself upon the trail, and although the man from Texas was disguised, his limp had betrayed him to the lynx-eyed Pious Phil.

"We must never lose sight of that trio," whispered the lean alcalde to his young pard. "The whole game depends on that now."

At that moment Captain Rob and Agate Alf dodged into a deep by-street which, if followed to its terminus, would throw them into the Chinese quarter.

Colonel Tarantula did not hesitate, but plunged after them. The king of the chaparral cheated by his enemy the night before in the House of the Crimson Trump gnashed his teeth like a bloodhound.

He longed to draw the revolver that he clutched in his pocket, and send a bullet whistling through the head of Ruby Rob, but he knew that it was better policy to follow him, for would he not lead him to Golden Gate Kate?

The chase down the little street became exciting to Pious Phil and pard. There were few people on it at the time and the two mountain toughs were easily seen.

More than once Captain Rob looked over his shoulder, but he did not seem to see the man who was running him down, and he did not know that despite his fierce threat of death within twenty-four hours, Leroy La Croix had communicated the daring robbery to his detectives.

Ruby Rob had keener eyes than Colonel Tarantula credited him with having. He saw more in those backward glances than the Texas ratter thought.

All at once the two Satanscrown sports turned, as if at a word of command. As they faced Tarantula their hands went up, and two revolvers clicked in unison.

Colonel Tarantula saw the movement.

"Ha! I can play the same game!" he grated. "A challenge like this is accepted wherever I find it."

"Hands up, an' halt!" said Captain Rob, sternly. "We mean you, colonel."

Pious Phil and Idaho Ivan on the other side of the street saw this sudden transformation of scenery, and had halted.

Colonel Tarantula was not disposed to obey. He gave the two desperadoes an angry look, and refused to throw up his hands.

"Just as you like, colonel," came laughingly over Captain Rob's revolver. "The best hand in the game is the one that wins last. An' thet hand belongs ter me!"

The sharp crack of a six-shooter on that narrow street drowned the final word, and less than a dozen persons saw a man pitch forward and strike the stones.

When the smoke cleared away the man lay still, and somebody in the hastily-gathered crowd said:

"He is dead!"

It was true.

Colonel Tarantula had played his game!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FINAL PLAY.

THE night that closed about the day of the startling events recorded in the last chapter was one full of excitement to San Francisco.

The shooting of a man in broad daylight on the street by a person who was supposed to be the cool blade who had deliberately robbed Leroy La Croix of some very valuable papers, was something out of the ordinary run of events.

Certain parties identified the dead man, and the early evening papers called him Major Mossback, Colonel Tarantula and half a dozen other names.

Captain Rob was the most hunted man in Frisco now. La Croix had the best detectives to be had in his employ: he was ready to move heaven and earth for the papers of which he had been robbed.

"Let me get them back and the sleekest sharp living shall not rob me!" he said to himself. "I don't believe that Kate Lossing has been found, and if she has been I will see that she never touches the bonanza. Gold Gaston can play here in Frisco the deep games he learned in Catfish Camp."

Ruby Rob and Agate Alf had disappeared immediately after the killing. Onyx Oil was still in the Station, held there by the banker's influence, and he constantly cursed himself for the injudicious play he had made.

Detectives had pumped him about Ruby Rob, but their adroitness had availed nothing. Onyx Oil would not betray his chief.

"We ar' playin' for three an' a quarter millions. I don't go back on the cap'n with a bonanza like thet ahead," he said to himself.

Captain Rob had not left the city, and when the detectives were looking for him everywhere he was in the most populous part confronting a young girl whose beauty was striking.

"A man doesn't often make a haul like this," said the mountain sport, and his hand dropped lightly upon a package that lay on the table before him. "Hyar ar' ther stakes ov ther gold game, Kate, or Mountain Moss. They're worth playin' for, eh?"

The girl's eyes brightened, and she put out her hand toward the package, but Captain Rob snatched it and drew it back.

"No, not now, my gold-finch," he laughed. "When you ar' queen o' somewhar you can draw on ther bonanza bank, but not just yet! In ther first place, you ar' Mrs. Phantom—"

"No!" cried the girl. "I repudiate the ceremony that made me in name your wife. The man who assumed to be a minister was your tool—Agate Alf. I told him once in the mountains that I had seen him before. Then two years of my life were blotted out, as it were, but now I have them all again. The fall from the window when San Tonquin Maud had her hand at my throat brought back the missing years. I remember all now—the journey from San Francisco with my father, the three men who went along as guides, and the slow movement over the mountain trail. Captain Rob, I have found two of those men. You are one, and the man called Agate Alf is the other. You three men went with us for a terrible purpose. One night I was aroused by a shot. I pulled the curtain of the wagon aside, and what did I see? Three men standing over a dead body—my father's! I saw you in the light of the camp-fire, and when one of you came toward the wagon, I fell back, and, through the horror of that scene, I lost two years of my life. Tell me this is not true. I see it all now, as if I were in the wagon at this moment, and it was all done for the papers that lie under your hand. You call them the big bonanza; the world calls them the Lossing millions. But the game is not played through yet."

"Why not?" asked the desperado, with a grin. "We have you an' ther bonanza. Get away if you kin!"

The voice was full of a desperado's triumph. "San Francisco is at your heels. Your last act, the shooting of Colonel Tarantula, has connected you with the bold theft of my fortunes."

Captain Rob threw up one hand and snapped his bronze fingers.

"I've been hunted before!" he laughed. "So you think that ther man who performed ther ceremony war Agate Alf?"

"I know it," said the girl, positively.

"I'll call him in an' let you compliment him to his face," the Satanscrown boss went on, and picking up the package he left the room.

He did not close the door behind him, but left it ajar. The eyes of the gold heiress glistened strangely.

All at once a door behind her opened almost noiselessly, and as she turned a hand with long fingers closed on her arm.

The next moment she recoiled with a wild cry. "You? My God! In heaven's name, help!—help! hel—"

Captain Rob came back into the room like a summoned tiger!

He saw Golden Gate Kate struggling in the grasp of a woman who was armed with a knife. "Nugget Nell, or Viper Bess, as I know you now!" he exclaimed, and then he darted forward, caught a right arm in its descent, and, in the twinkling of an eye, tore the two women apart.

"In Satan's name whar did you come from?" he continued, holding the queen of Satanscrown an arm's-length as he gazed into her flushed face and flashing eyes.

"Ask me not! I am here!" came from between the siren's teeth.

"I thank fortune that you ar'! I know you at last! You ar' ther woman I hunted once because you had administered a subtle pi'zen ter my brother, deprivin' him of his reason. Jove! if I had known this before I would have killed you in Satanscrown. You have captivated me—Donald's brother. This is the secret you hev kept from me; this is why you feared that Colonel Tarantula, who knew the crime, would drag me back ter Frisco. Jealous ter ther core, you hev hunted me up, an' you would hev killed ther gold girl."

Nugget Nell showed her teeth like a leopardess.

"D'yer think I'll spare?" the mountain sport went on. "Hyar ends yer game, Viper Bess! I shall avenge my brother first, an' then turn on all Frisco that hunts me! I've got the gold bonanza, and you—you've got—death!"

The hand leaped from wrist to throat, and the camp Cleopatra uttered a startling cry as it closed there.

Kate Lossing shuddered and shrunk back. She felt like shutting her eyes to the futile struggle of that vile woman in the grasp of her once lover, but now an avenger.

She saw Nugget Nell pushed to the wall; she heard a cry which told her that the bronze hands of the Colorado ruffian had done their work; then something fell to the floor.

When he looked up again the door opened and Agate Alf came in. A bound carried him to Captain Rob's side.

"Ther ferrets hev found us, cap'n," he said, in low tones.

"So had that creature! Look, Agate!" and Ruby Rob pointed toward the woman lying on the floor in the light of the lamp.

A moment later the boss of Satanscrown came toward the Golden Gate heiress, and his hand glided swiftly toward her wrist.

"If you utter a cry, you will follow that woman," he said, glancing toward Nugget Nell. "Agate Alf says that ther Frisco ferrets hev found us. There is a way ov escape. If thar's a man who knows the gold coast capital better than Satanscrown Rob, I'd like ter see 'im!"

In a minute the trio were in a room almost entirely dark.

"Ther trap, Agate. This is ther last play, but it leads ter success."

The girl heard a floor in the floor lifted, and a pair of arms encircled her.

"We ar' now under Frisco," said a voice at her ear. "Ten years ago, the woman lyin' dead overhead escaped by this same tunnel."

Mountain Moss said nothing.

The journey in the dark seemed interminable, but they stopped at last. Agate Alf left them but soon came back.

"It is as silent as the grave," he said.

"We go up, then."

The following moment another trap-door opened, and the girl was carried up a short flight of steps.

"Now, a match, Agate," said Captain Rob's voice.

The flame of a lucifer flashed up in the darkness.

"Ther ferrets hev been baffled," exclaimed Ruby Rob. "They can't catch tigers—ther fools!"

"Can't, Captain Rob?" said a strange voice.

"What do you call us?"

At that moment the bull's-eye of a dark-lantern threw its vivid light upon the startled group.

"Hounded down by ther boy!" cried Agate Alf.

"An' ther Frisco police!" grated the Colorado sport.

The tableau that presented itself was certainly striking.

Idaho Ivan, flanked by two men, covered Captain Rob with a revolver. There was victory in the boy's eyes.

"Pious Phil knows this house like a book, captain," said the boy miner. "The tunnel was expected to bring you here when Phil attacked in front. We found you by following Nugget Nell after you shot Colonel Tarantula. Release the girl!"

It did not require much effort on Mountain Moss's part to glide from the sport's arms.

The two pards stood thunderstruck before Idaho Ivan and the two police.

All at once they exchanged glances.

"Fight it out!" said the captain's look.

The next instant the hand of Ruby Rob alighted on his revolver, and Idaho Ivan fired.

"It takes a quick hand to beat you. I know that," said the boy, as the stalwart sport staggered toward the wall.

The two men rushed like tigers at Agate Alf, and secured him before the smoke of Idaho Ivan's revolver had touched the ceiling.

"The end of the game," said the young miner, as he took Kate's hand.

"Would to Heaven it had never been played!" was the response.

"For the fortune at stake I care not. My life at Trigger Bar was happiness. We shall go back there again, Ivan."

Yes, the big game for the Lossing millions has been played to an end.

We have followed the players from play to play, from the gold-camps of Colorado to the heart of San Francisco. Only a few moves have escaped our eyes.

We have seen them fall, one by one, along the trail, from the mysterious assassination of the Silent Hound of California to the deadly retribution that overtook Captain Rob when he thought he had the fortune secure.

But little remains to be added here.

Leroy La Croix was disappointed when he learned that his private detectives had failed to be in "at the death," and his disappointment was complete when the long-lost heiress came forward in person to claim her rights.

Agate Alf admitted that the ceremony he had performed over Captain Rob and Mountain Moss was a mock one, which they expected to use in case of an emergency.

The girl was no man's wife.

The night after the wind-up of the game for three millions a certain prisoner escaped from a station-house in San Francisco, and the papers informed the people the next morning that Onyx Oil, whom we may meet hereafter, was free once more.

Agate Alf was tried for a crime committed far from San Francisco in the mountains, for Kate's testimony was enough to convince a California jury that he had assisted at the death of her father.

Justice does not ride on a snail's back in California.

Agate Alf was strangled by the law.

When Kate came into the possession of her estate she paid off all Colorado Carlos's queer drafts on "Git-Thar Bank," and there was general regret that the strange character had not lived to pay them himself.

Pious Phil did not go back to Trigger Bar, but remained in San Francisco, where he is still to be seen about one of the finest residences on Nob Hill, occupied by Idaho Ivan and his beautiful wife.

Why not end our romance here?
The game is over.

THE END.

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